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# Guilty Subjects: The Biopolitical Function of Guilt in Neoliberal States

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism  
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts  
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GUILTY SUBJECTS: THE BIOPOLITICAL FUNCTION OF GUILT IN NEOLIBERAL  
STATES

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

David Miller

Graduate Program in Theory & Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the function of guilt as an emotion and affective state in the production of voluntary servitude. Drawing on psychological research into the effects of guilt, as well as the theories of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, I argue that guilt is instilled within the population by a particular political arrangement of relations of power (the State form of social relations) via a controlled process of subjectivation. As such, guilt should be read as a distinctly biopolitical mechanism of control. Additionally, I argue that the emotional experience of guilt works to attach individuals to their own subjugation and domination by moving them to engage in activities and circulations that reinforce the dominant arrangements of power. In the contemporary era, the dominant arrangement of power is constituted by the neoliberal State, which works to instill guilt by producing an environment of subjectivation consisting of discourses of personal responsibility and the proliferation of financial debt.

## Keywords

Guilt, Debt, Bad Conscience, Biopolitics, Voluntary Servitude, Affect, Emotion, Neoliberalism, The State, Personal Responsibility, Subjectivity, Environment of Subjectivation, Nietzsche, Foucault, Butler.

## Acknowledgments

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## Legend of Titles References

*BoB – The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France* – Michel Foucault

*HoS – The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* – Michel Foucault

*GAO – Giving an Account of Oneself* – Judith Butler

*GBD – Governing by Debt* – Maurizio Lazzarato

*GM – The Genealogy of Morals* – Friedrich Nietzsche

*MOIM – The Making of Indebted Man* – Maurizio Lazzarato

*NP – Nietzsche and Philosophy* – Gilles Deleuze

*PLP – The Psychic Life of Power* – Judith Butler

*SMBD – “Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the College de France* – Michel Foucault

*STP – Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France* – Michel Foucault

## Introduction

Questions of guilt in politics can be traced back quite far, to at least the Romans, who “may have been the first to introduce into politics the claim to their own moral right, and the moral condemnation of their opponents” (Jaspers 41), and these questions have taken many different forms across the centuries. Indeed, given guilt’s fundamentally social and relational nature, issues of guilt attribution would seem to arise as a natural result of human beings residing together. Whenever people have asked who is to blame for a particular political catastrophe, whom is responsible for a social injustice, or what is owed to society for an individual transgression, they have been questioning the role of guilt in politics. Yet, such questions rarely seem to address the *affective* component of guilt—the connection between guilt as a personal, emotional state and the public life of politics.

Indeed, it wasn’t until the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that thinkers began to pay serious attention to the connection between the emotional content of guilt and its political effects. But with this newfound attention came an explosion in the theorization of guilt. As Joseph Amato notes:

A sense of guilt clings to this age and is diffused throughout it. Twentieth-century high culture testifies to contemporary man’s obsession with guilt. Freudian-inspired psychology, existential literature and philosophy, as well as many theologies are predicated upon the assumption that guilt is a fundamental reality of the human condition...Even ‘reformers,’ who contend that guilt is the fundamental barrier to human liberation, assume the central place of guilt in twentieth-century experience (4-5).



However, despite this proliferation in the theorization of guilt, twentieth-century conceptions of political guilt still seem inadequate for addressing guilt's *contemporary* political function. Specifically, these past theories of guilt cannot account for the way that guilt works as a *biopolitical* State mechanism, how it is *instilled* through neoliberal economies of debt, or its particular role in the perpetuation of political relations of *domination*.

As such, it is my intention for this thesis to provide an account of guilt that is capable of addressing how guilt relates to politics *today*. But before moving on to my own interpretation of guilt's political function, it is necessary to understand the underlying motivation for this project and the problems that it will seek to address.

The impetus for this project is an issue that has haunted political theory since at least the sixteenth century, when it was expressed by Étienne de La Boétie as *the problem of voluntary servitude*. For de La Boétie, this problem arises from the observation that “It is...the inhabitants [of States] themselves who permit, or, rather, bring about, their own subjection, since by ceasing to submit they would put an end to their servitude” (46). This observation, that political subjection always requires the willful consent of those who are subjected, raises an important question: *why do people continue not only to submit to, but actively engage in, their own domination and subjection?* Indeed, this seems to be a perennial question in politics<sup>1</sup>—one that

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<sup>1</sup> As Deleuze and Guattari express so well in their book *Anti-Oedipus*, where they assert that “the fundamental problem of political philosophy is still precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly, and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered: ‘Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?’ How can people possibly reach the point of shouting: ‘More taxes! Less bread!’? As Reich remarks, the astonishing thing is not that some people steal or that others occasionally go out on strike, but rather that all those who are starving do not steal as a regular practice, and all those who are exploited are not continually out on strike: after centuries of exploitation, why do people still tolerate being humiliated and enslaved, to such a point, indeed, that they actually want humiliation and slavery not only for others but for themselves?” (29). Such sentiments seem just as relevant today as in the past.

has been taken up in turn by the anarchists, the psychoanalytic branches of Marxism, and most recently by queer and affect theory. But while, for Boétie, the problem largely consisted in why and how the many (the multitudinous inhabitants of a State) would voluntarily submit to the will and rule of the one (the sovereign or tyrant) who could not possibly resist the force of their collective strength should they choose to reject the tyrant's rule and reclaim their liberty (de La Boétie 44, 48), more recent formulations of the problem of voluntary servitude focus on the way that *relations of power maintain themselves in relatively stable formations of domination*, without this domination being the effect of the singular will of an individual tyrant.

Much of this recent theorization of voluntary servitude starts by questioning the role of *emotions* in politics—specifically, the way that emotions can attach us to current formations of power, and how the emotional life of subjects becomes an important factor in the perpetuation of domination (Ahmed 11-12). But contemporary affect theory differs significantly from past interpretations of the political function of emotion in its conception of the particular relation between affect and politics. Rather than examining the ways in which emotions (or passions) can be ordered, suppressed, or ignored through the use of conscious reason in order to produce a proper type of politics, affect theory examines how the circulation of emotion is *always already* involved in the functioning of politics, and attempts to give an account of the particular political effects of this circulation (Ross vii, 9-16). Such attention to the political circulation of emotion is justified as “not only necessary but contemporaneous. It occurs in parallel to a set of economic and cultural developments that aim to invest and harness the productive powers of life. The turn to affect is therefore legitimized as timely because it provides a way of understanding and engaging with a set of broader changes in societal (re)production in the context of mutations in capitalism” (Anderson, “Modulating the Excess of Affect: Morale in a State of ‘Total War’”

165). As such, this branch of contemporary theory attempts to show the political *function* of emotions within present contexts—what specific effects various emotions produce, and the types of politics that correspond to such effects. More specifically, many theorists in this vein (primarily those working at the intersection of queer and affect theory) take up the problem of voluntary servitude by examining how the effects of particular emotions serve to produce and maintain normative political structures by passionately attaching individuals to the power that subjects them (Ahmed 205-208).

My project will constitute a particular intervention into this field by examining the effects of one particular affective condition—the feeling of *guilt*—in contemporary political contexts. Through this thesis, I will work to show that, in the contemporary political context dominated by neoliberal and biopolitical modes of State governance, control is no longer maintained through the coercive mechanisms of discipline and sovereignty, which act directly on individual bodies. Rather, control is produced through a guided process of subjectivation that takes place in relation to normative and economic structures—particularly, discourses of personal responsibility and the circulation of financial debt—which aim to instill individuals with a sense of guilt. I will further examine how this sense of guilt functions to attach subjects to the neoliberal and biopolitical State as the dominant arrangement of power that provides the initial conditions of their subjectivation, motivating them to engage in activities that conform to the normative standards of the State, thereby reproducing the State as a relation of domination. It is my contention that guilt thus functions in contemporary political contexts to produce a form of voluntary servitude.

Following the recent lines of theoretical inquiry presented by affect theorists, I believe that addressing questions of voluntary servitude requires that we examine “how emotions can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination” (Ahmed 12) through the process of

subjectivation (Butler *PLP* 1-8, 107-113). Yet, while affect theorists have accounted for the role of emotions in politics *generally*,<sup>2</sup> and have extensively described the implications of *certain* emotional states, many emotions remain relatively under-theorized. Emotions such as love, fear, hatred, and shame have all been carefully examined by theorists spanning many disciplines, yet a certain silence exists within affect theory around the topic of *guilt*. This silence may be justified, given the preoccupation with guilt that marked much political theory of the twentieth century. Faced with an abundance of texts dedicated to examining the various psychological and philosophical aspects of guilt, one might conclude that guilt has already been properly accounted for and addressed—that there is nothing left to say about guilt’s affective impact and political implications. I believe this to be inaccurate. While the past century has seen a veritable explosion in the theorization of guilt, these accounts remain inadequate for explaining guilt’s role in producing and maintaining *current* formations of power. Previous accounts of the relation between guilt and politics are insufficient for addressing the current political context, as they often elide the *affective* content of guilt and generally ignore the connection between *guilt and debt*. In response, *my project will attempt to account for the role of guilt in the formation and maintenance of contemporary power relations* by examining guilt as a biopolitical mechanism of control that is prompted and instilled through the circulation of *financial debt* within the neoliberal State.

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<sup>2</sup> For recent and notable examples of how the political implications of emotion generally (rather than particular emotions) are being examined by affect theorists, see: *Mixed Emotions: Beyond Fear and Hatred in International Conflict* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014) by Andrew A.G. Ross; “Feel Your Way” from *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) by Sara Ahmed; *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Routledge, 1998) edited by Gillian Bendelow and Simon J. Williams; and *Encountering Affect: Capacities, Apparatuses, Conditions* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014) by Ben Anderson.

In undertaking this project, my intention is to provide some initial insights into how the current organization of power is able in the face of its obvious failings to maintain itself against organized resistance. It is my contention that *guilt*, in its specific effects and its relation to the process of subjectivation, is of particular importance with regard to political subordination, as it is fundamental in determining *behaviour* by providing *immediate, subjective punishment or reinforcement for particular actions* (Tangney and Dearing 134-35). By reinforcing normative behaviours and discouraging transgression, guilt can function as an insidiously effective tool of domination—one which makes the subject complicit in their own subordination, and which aligns them with the very powers that subject them. Guilt is thus eminently useful to the production of voluntary servitude.

Additionally, while guilt may be a perennial problem for politics, it is also of particular contemporary importance. As I will argue later on, guilt is an affective condition that is phenomenologically well-suited to the biopolitical project of bolstering and increasing the inner forces of the State, while simultaneously being the emotion most closely connected to the experience of indebtedness. Because of guilt's close connection to both *debt* and *responsibility* (GM 194), it is an especially prominent emotion in the neoliberal era of *debt economies* and discourses of *personal responsibility*. Indeed, the emotion of guilt can work to attach us to neoliberal economies of debt, thereby serving as a condition of their ability to continue functioning smoothly. Guilt is thus an important affective factor when considering the question of voluntary servitude in the contemporary era.

In the following chapters I will attempt to provide a contemplative examination of the ways in which guilt functions to produce voluntary servitude under neoliberal and biopolitical governmentalities, first by examining how guilt functions generally as a mechanism of political

control, and subsequently exploring the ways in which guilt is produced in the neoliberal era through economies of debt. Starting from a reading of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, my intention is to show how the internalization of guilt by individuals and populations—especially when that guilt is felt for something the individual or group is not conceivably responsible for—becomes a mechanism of political control that both directs individual activity toward maintaining current structures of power, and produces a subject that actually desires, and therefore becomes complicit in, their own oppression. I will be examining guilt as an affective phenomenon, related but not reducible to its legal or psychological manifestations, and the specific political uses to which guilt has been put to work. Given the obvious connections between the concepts of guilt and debt, and the current proliferation of financial debt in neoliberal economies, a large portion of this project will be devoted to exploring the concept of debt and how it is used to advance neoliberal State agendas that produce and reproduce oppressive power relations meant to reinforce the State and capitalist world economy.

As such, the analysis of guilt that I will undertake through this thesis will be divided into three main chapters. In the first chapter, I will draw on recent research in the field of social psychology and affect studies to define the particular affective features of guilt, arguing that the painful or uncomfortable experience of guilt is felt as a sense of indebtedness that prompts the individual who feels it both to reflect on themselves as an object of inquiry, and to engage in activities that work to bolster dominant normative structures. I will then work to show how the interpretations of guilt's relation to politics that proliferated during the twentieth century up to the present have failed to account for this affective dimension of guilt, or its intimate connection to debt.

In the second chapter, I will outline a theoretical framework that can account for the political import of guilt's affective aspects and connection to debt. This theoretical framework will start from a reading of Nietzsche's genealogy of guilt as a moral emotion used in the training, habituation, and subjectivation of individuals, whereby "the oldest and most primitive relationship between human beings, that of buyer and seller, creditor and debtor" (202) has been distilled to its highest potency as a mechanism for "self-discipline, self-surveillance, [and] self-conquest" (265) instilled in the majority by a powerful minority for the maintenance of control. I will then extend this genealogy of guilt into the present by reading it in conjunction with Foucault's work on biopower and biopolitics, arguing that guilt still functions as a mechanism of control, as it is instilled and mobilized by the biopolitical State through the strategic creation of a normative environment that produces guilty subjects who will maintain themselves in a relation of submission to the State, rather than moving beyond it. This process of producing submissive subjects will be further explained through Judith Butler's theories of subjectivation, which will be referenced to demonstrate how guilt can be instilled through the process of subject formation, and how it functions to attach the subject to dominant arrangements of power. I will then combine these disparate theories into a theoretical framework in order to explain how guilt is instilled in contemporary biopolitical States through the development of an environment of norms in relation to which individuals are subjected, and how this guilt is then mobilized as a mechanism for producing a form of voluntary servitude.

The third and final chapter will then be devoted to examining the particular features of the environment of subjectivation that is used to instill and mobilize guilt in the contemporary era of neoliberalism. Through this chapter, I will argue that the primary means of instilling guilt in the neoliberal State are the circulation of discourses of personal responsibility and the

proliferation of financial debt. Each of these factors will be examined in detail to explain how they function to produce an affective perception of guilt, and how they are promoted by the neoliberal State. This will additionally involve a brief detour into the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, who offers an explanation of how macro-level social structures are translated into individual, micro-level dispositions, practices, and emotions. Financial debt and discourses of personal responsibility will then be examined in conjunction as the social structures that constitute a social environment which works to guide the process of subjectivation towards producing guilty subjects who will remain in submission to the State of their own accord.

However, before moving on to these examinations, I will need to define the contours of my project in two ways: first, by positioning it within the history of theory pertaining to political guilt, and second, by explaining what is meant by the term “guilt” within the limits of this thesis. By positioning my project in this way, I hope to indicate the strengths and limitations of past interpretations of the politics of guilt, thereby justifying the necessity of this project and providing a clearer understanding of how I have conceptualized guilt.

The following chapter will therefore be devoted to situating my project in relation to past interpretations of the politics of guilt, and providing a robust definition of the features and effects of guilt as an affective condition.



## Chapter 1

### 1 What is Guilt?

Guilt is not simply an abstract, formal, or legal category under which subjects are placed by an external judge. Guilt is also an affective condition experienced by subjects psychologically and physiologically as a distinct *emotion*, which produces certain behavioural effects. Following the lead of contemporary psychological research that has attempted to map both the phenomenological experience of guilt and its particular effects on subjective behaviour (Lewis, Tangney and Dearing), I will attempt here to outline some of the basic characteristics of guilt, before proceeding on to my interpretation of the *political* uses of guilt in the next chapter. My hope is that a precise description of guilt's affective content will help to situate my project and provide a helpful background to my later discussion of guilt's political content.

So, what is guilt? And what are its emotional contents and effects? It should be noted that guilt is a notoriously difficult concept to define, as it encompasses various legal, emotional, and existential meanings. Additionally, the particular affective content of guilt has also been difficult to define, as guilt has often been confused or conflated with shame in past psychological research (Tangney and Dearing 12). As Roger W. Smith suggests, guilt thus becomes “a concept of a peculiar sort, a concept with ‘blurred edges’” (“Introduction” 18). This does not mean that guilt is impossible to conceptualize, but simply that any attempt to define guilt will end up eliding some of its features in favour of others. Because of the limited scope of this project, I have chosen to focus only on the affective aspects of guilt that I find politically relevant. As such, I will be

emphasizing guilt's connection to *feelings* of responsibility and indebtedness, while largely ignoring the more formal or legal interpretations of guilt.

In the following section, I will offer a short description of the major emotional features of guilt. This description will act as the basis for my further discussions of guilt in the next two chapters.

## 1.1 Definitions

Guilt constitutes a painful or uncomfortable emotional experience that is simultaneously *self-conscious* and *relational* (other-oriented) (Tangney and Dearing 64). The feeling of guilt is prompted by the consciousness of a moral or normative boundary in the moment of its (perceived) transgression or potential transgression, and an accompanying sense of *responsibility* for this transgression (Smith, "Introduction" 19-21). Guilt, in turn, produces a sense of *indebtedness to others* within the subject. The ambivalence of guilt—that it is both a self-conscious *and* an other-oriented experience—can be explained by this connection to the transgression of boundaries.

The pain or discomfort experienced in transgressing a normative boundary prompts the subject to pay attention and reflect on itself as a being. As Ahmed notes, "experiences of dysfunction (such as pain) become lived as a return to the body... pain can often lead to a body that *turns in on itself*, while pleasure tends to open up bodies to other bodies" (26). The pain or discomfort experienced in guilt functions in the same way, causing the individual to self-reflexively "turn in on itself" and pay attention to its own being. For Butler, this "turning back upon one-self" prompted by the pain of guilt for transgressing norms "is... the condition of the possibility of the subject" and as such,

“[the guilt of] bad conscience *fabricates* the soul, that expanse of interior psychic space” (PLP 67). This is the *self-reflexivity* of guilt (Butler PLP 67-68, 74-75), which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter in relation to Nietzsche’s concept of internalization and Butler’s theories of subjectivation. For now it is enough to note that guilt constitutes a self-conscious emotion insofar as it prompts the individual to become aware of themselves as a subject.

However, the pain of guilt is prompted by a boundary that has been imposed from outside the subject, as is the case with moral standards and norms, even when these norms have been fully internalized into the subject’s consciousness (Butler PLP 74-75). As such, in the experience of guilt, the subject is necessarily oriented towards some others (those imposing the norms or morals) through a recognition of the boundary that has been transgressed (Tangney and Dearing 52, 64). Such recognition of the boundary and its transgression additionally prompts a sense of responsibility and indebtedness—a responsibility to provide some form of reparation for the transgression, which is experienced as a *debt* that must be paid to the other who has been transgressed against (Smith, “Introduction” 21). The pain or discomfort of guilt acts as a further incentive to cancel the debt of transgression through an act of reparation, and thereby relieve the subject’s guilt. Such acts of reparation are necessarily directed towards the other who has been transgressed against, and are aimed at repaying that other as a means of cancelling the debt of guilt (Ghorbani et al. 313). Guilt is thus also *relational* insofar as it is experienced as a form of indebtedness, and makes one conscious of their impact on others through the transgression of externally imposed or formulated standards.

This relational aspect of guilt has prompted many theorists to interpret guilt as an *empathetic* emotion—one feels guilt when they perceive that their actions have affected others negatively, rather than being concerned with their own reputation (Tangney and Dearing 86-87)—but I believe it should simply be read primarily as a sign of guilt’s eminently *social* character. Feelings of guilt may be experienced privately in response to purely subjective perceptions of transgression, but the emotion of guilt itself must first be *socially developed* and instilled. Additionally, this implies that guilt is not simply a “natural” or proper psychological response to the transgression of normative boundaries. As will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter in relation to Nietzsche’s genealogy of guilt, an individual’s affective perception of guilt must be seen as the result of a social training in *responsibility*, rather than as a natural emotional response (*GM* 217-221). This is further supported by Tangney and Dearing’s research into the psychology of guilt and shame, which finds that an individual’s level of guilt-proneness is highly correlated to their patterns of socialization, and is a product of both familial and general social interactions (Tangney and Dearing 148-49). Guilt is thus the product of *a certain mode of socialization*, rather than being a natural empathetic response. It is my contention that the mode of socialization that produces guilt within the individual is the arrangement of social relations experienced as the State form of polity.

But even as guilt is fundamentally relational and tied to socialization, the *feeling* of guilt also produces particular effects for the individual. Recent research into the psychology of guilt suggests that it be viewed as an eminently *productive* emotion, as it causes people to become active, moving them to engage in positive activity, rather than to become passive (Ghorbani et al. 313). This has been seen as guilt’s primary difference

from shame, which prompts the shamed subject to hide away from others who might witness their shame, and to disengage from the world of activity (Nelissen et al. 357-38). By contrast, guilt is linked to the sense that one can or should make changes to one's behaviour by actively engaging in reparative activity (Tangney and Dearing 18-19).

But what *kinds* of behaviour are produced by guilt? Empirical studies into the psychology of guilt and shame suggest that feelings of guilt result in an internalized self-beratement and subjective punishment while simultaneously prompting reparative behaviours and conformity to social norms as its external manifestation (Nelissen et al. 360). Rather than the defensive responses of shame, which can result in anger or the externalization of blame, the experience of guilt produces a “constructive” response whereby the subject seeks to correct their perceived wrongdoing by reinforcing or repairing the transgressed normative structure (Tangney and Dearing 95-97). This relates to the connection between feelings of guilt and a sense of indebtedness—having incurred a debt through their transgression, the individual must repay that debt *within the conditions permitted*, which requires that they reassimilate to the transgressed norms. Additionally, the “constructive” response to guilt also involves taking on responsibility and internalizing blame, as well as reappraising situations towards shifting blame onto oneself—the taking on of responsibility for transgressions which may not be the fault of the individual (Tangney 97-104). As a result, guilt also provokes an increase in *self-monitoring*, or the constant evaluation of one's own behaviour against internalized standards (Tangney and Dearing 66).

In essence, guilt works to produce normative behaviours that conform to the standards that have been assimilated by the individual from their social group or

community. The guilt-prone individual tends to be a non-disruptive subject, as their experiences of guilt provoke behaviours that align with the dominant norms and standards of their social milieu. Recent psychological literature has thus taken to labelling guilt as an *adaptive* (rather than maladaptive) emotion, as it helps the subject integrate into the current set of norms or morals presented by their society. This reading of guilt as an adaptive emotion is furthered by the observation that guilt-prone individuals are less likely to engage in behaviours considered to be *risky*, including drug use, criminal activity, premarital sex, or suicide (Tangney and Dearing 135-37). While the issue of *risk* and risky behaviour will be of importance in the next chapter, where I will discuss the biopolitical implications of guilt, it is enough for now to note that the feeling of guilt serves to reduce the possibility of behaviours that could be read as risky or threatening to the subject themselves or to the normative cohesion of the social body. Furthermore, because of its highly *productive* character, which prompts reparative moral behaviour and conformity to social norms, guilt also serves to *bolster* the social body against the threat of risk (Tangney and Dearing 56, 104). Those psychologists who read the behavioural effects of guilt as “adaptive” thus view it as a socially beneficial emotion, and so go on to advocate therapeutic interventions to produce guilt-prone individuals through parenting, therapy, and certain forms of reparative justice (Tangney and Dearing 180-194).

However, while my understanding of the affective content of guilt and its behavioural effects is largely in line with this recent psychological research, I interpret these phenomena quite differently. While many social psychologists view the characteristics of guilt as “adaptive” and useful for the development of moral individuals, I interpret these same phenomena as indicative of guilt’s *biopolitical* usefulness as a

mechanism for the perpetuation of domination. Reading guilt as a positive and adaptive emotion allows social psychologists to view guilt-proneness as being a *positive characteristic for the guilt-prone individuals themselves* as it helps them to integrate into society. But such an interpretation requires one to ignore the greater political ramifications of such a project, or, more specifically, the ways in which it serves to attach individuals to the arrangements of power that subject and dominate them as a means of perpetuating those arrangements of power. My intention is thus to offer a counter-reading of the effects of guilt by linking them to their specifically *political* ramifications within the contemporary context of the neoliberal and biopolitical State.

As mentioned previously, interpreting guilt as a political phenomenon is not particularly new or novel—in fact, there has been a veritable surge in theories of political guilt over the past century. Yet, I believe these past interpretations remain inadequate to explain guilt's *current* political function or its role in the production of voluntary servitude. In order to justify these claims, I will devote the remaining section of this chapter to examining the principal theories of political guilt formulated over the course of the twentieth century, before presenting my own interpretation.

## 1.2 Past Interpretations of Guilt's Relation to Politics

The connection between guilt and politics has been formulated in various ways by a plethora of theorists across the span of the past century. Yet, while all these theories do differ widely in content, they can be roughly divided into three thematic categories based on their level of social analysis. I have termed these categories the *individual-civilizational*, the *collective-national*, and the *fragmented-individual* conceptions of

political guilt, based on the primary concerns of those theorists who fall within each category.

Each of these categories represents a body of theory which can encompass the work of a variety of individual theorists. However, in the following sections I will attempt to synthesize the basic concerns and insights of these theorists in order to provide a general overview of each category. Additionally, each category corresponds roughly to a set of specific socio-historical conditions from which it arises or is motivated. I will thus also attempt to provide some background as to the motivating social factors out of which each of these categories of thought emerges. Presenting an overview of these past formulations of political guilt will then allow me to situate my project in relation to these categories, demonstrating points of resonance and divergence between my interpretation and past interpretations of guilt's relation to politics.

It is my contention that these past interpretations are inadequate for addressing guilt in relation to contemporary social conditions, as they each lack a robust account of guilt's connection to *debt*, and as such, cannot explain the specific methods by which guilt is instilled and mobilized today. Past interpretations of the politics of guilt seem unable to explain how guilt is produced and how it works to attach subjects to the power that subjects them in the era of the neoliberal and biopolitical State. My intention for this project, then, is to provide a counter-reading of guilt's relation to politics that can be applied to our contemporary situation—specifically, neoliberal debt economies and biopolitical States. In order to do so, I will focus on guilt's relation to *debt*, its use as a distinctly *biopolitical* mechanism, and its connection to the process of *subjectivation*, reading guilt as an affective condition that is eminently useful for the perpetuation of



domination. Ironically, this will require me to re-examine, as part of the theoretical framework I will build in the next chapter, an interpretation of guilt that precedes those outlined here—namely, the genealogy of guilt provided by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals*, which focuses specifically on the connection between guilt and debt in the process of domination.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will present an overview of each thematic category of the past interpretations of political guilt, starting from the broadest level of analysis (the individual-civilizational) and working down to the most particular (the fragmented-individual), while also indicating how my project will diverge from these interpretations.

### 1.3 The Individual-Civilizational Conception of Guilt

The first thematic category of theory related to the politics of guilt that I will examine here is the *individual-civilizational* conception of guilt. This theory arose in the early decades of the twentieth century, and was primarily developed by Sigmund Freud through his work on psychoanalysis.<sup>3</sup> It has subsequently been taken up by various theorists who have drawn on Freudian psychoanalysis. I have termed this strain of theory individual-civilizational as it links individual experiences of guilt to the development and “progress” of Western civilization.

On this conception, the feelings of guilt experienced by individuals are believed to be caused by the realities of social life within civilization. Civilization here is defined

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<sup>3</sup> See particularly *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), and *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

as the arrangement of social relations based upon *rationality*, rather than the gratification of instinctual drives or desires (Fromm 25-26). It is the imposition of rules, norms, and laws which serve to order social life towards the achievement of higher-order gratifications and forms of productivity—the most important of which is *culture* (Freud, “Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning” 14-18). The civilized arrangement of social relations is not static, however. Rather, it involves a gradual and progressive rationalization of thinking and social relations, taking place across the long history of humanity (Fromm 25-26). The progress of civilization, then, is the process whereby rational cognition and choice increasingly come to replace the instinctual pursuit to gratify basic human desires and drives as the dominant mode of engaging with the world and other humans (Marcuse 46-47).

But this replacement of instinctual gratification by rational cognition comes at a cost, as the basic human drives can never be eliminated completely. As such, in order for civilization to function, the human instincts must first be psychologically *repressed* so that rational cognition may take their place. This repression is prompted by the realities of life within civilization, but takes place at the level of the individual through psychological processes that occur automatically. And the primary mechanism whereby instinctual repression is achieved is the individual’s sense of *guilt*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For Freud, individual guilt is the product of conflict between two parts of the human mental structure—the *ego* and the *superego*. The ego represents an individual’s consciousness, which exists to mediate between the individual’s instinctual desires and the real world, choosing which desires can safely be gratified given the conditions of reality, and repressing other desires which cannot (Freud *New Introductory Lectures* 106). The superego, by contrast, represents the portion of the mental structure that assimilates the rules and norms of civilized society, and provides the individual with moral imperatives that go beyond mere survival or gratification of the instincts. For Freud, the superego is the result of the Oedipal phase of childhood psychological development, wherein the child comes to identify with their father out of fear of castration, and assimilates his rules, prohibitions, and standards which come to form the core of the

On this model, guilt arises in response to the individual's transgressions (or even simply desired transgressions) against the laws and standards of civilization, which are internalized by the individual in the process of their psychological development (Tangney and Dearing 113-115). The feeling of guilt acts to repress the individual's natural instincts—which, if gratified, would run counter to the laws of civilization—by causing psychological pain in response to the desire to act on those instincts. Guilt thus functions to assimilate the individual into civilization and social life by preventing the gratification of self-centered instinctual desires, and prompting the individual to conform to rational laws and moral standards (Freud, “Dostoevsky and Parricide” 75). For the theorists of the individual-civilizational model, then, a certain level of guilt is to be expected within civilization, and is in fact *necessary* for its continuation.

However, as civilization progresses, its laws and standards also increase in number and intensity, leaving less and less room for the gratification of instincts, and consequently “the sense of guilt—the need for punishment generated by the transgressions or by the wish to transgress these restrictions...—[comes to permeate] the mental life” (Marcuse 33). For the individual-civilizational theorists, this presents a certain problem: while guilt has a decisive role in the development of civilization, as this

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superego (Tangney and Dearing 113-114). The father's laws are retained by the child's superego, which it in turn introjects into the ego, forming a *conscience* that motivates the ego to repress any desires or instincts which would transgress the external rules it has been given. As the child develops into adulthood, they are faced with an increasing array of authorities, laws, social norms, and standards, which are also taken in by the superego, and create ever greater amounts of repression (Marcuse 32-33). The primary vehicle of this repression is the feeling of guilt. For Freud, guilt is a product of clashes between the individual's ego and superego. The superego provides imperatives for the ego to follow. When the individual instinctually desires what is forbidden by the moral standards of the superego, the superego prompts the ego to repress those desires by producing a sense of guilt over the transgression or the desire for transgression (Tangney 12 and 113-115).

civilization “progresses” (becoming increasingly rationalized, providing ever more prohibitions for the individual) it demands greater and greater repression on the part of individuals, thus producing an increasing amount of guilt (Smith, “The Political Meaning of Unconscious Guilt” 186). This increased guilt, in turn, results in certain forms of neuroses and psychopathology, including anxiety, depression, and somatization, which are ultimately detrimental to the proper functioning of civilized society and require forms of intervention aimed at reintegration to be applied to the neurotic individual (Tangney and Dearing 113-114). The perpetual increase in the amount of repression and guilt experienced by individuals also produces an increasing discontent with civilization, resulting in a greater number of neurotic individuals (Marcuse 79-80). But while this situation may be regrettable, it is unavoidable—existence within civilization may be painful (guilt is not a pleasant feeling), but it is necessary and irreversible (Fromm 28).<sup>5</sup> Escape from civilization would be an escape into the wholesale destruction of humanity, and thus, the best that can be done is to reconcile neurotic individuals to the reality of life in civilization through some form of therapeutic intervention, which constitutes an additional site of repression.

On the individual-civilizational conception, then, the individual experience of guilt works to repress natural human drives and instincts so they may be replaced by rational cognition, which is the basic condition of civilization. Guilt is therefore viewed

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<sup>5</sup> As Fromm notes, “Freud, especially the Freud after the First World War, was a skeptic. He saw the problem of human evolution as an essentially tragic one. Whatever man did, it ended in frustration; if he should return to become a primitive again, he would have pleasure, but no wisdom; if he goes on as a builder of ever more complicated civilizations, he becomes wiser, but also unhappier and sicker. For Freud, evolution is an ambiguous blessing, and society does as much harm as it does good” (28).

as a *necessary* condition for the continued existence of civilization—without guilt, individuals would be governed by their instinctual desires rather than the rational laws and norms of civilized society, which would prevent the development of higher-order human products, like culture. This would also mark the end of society generally, as the human instincts are believed to be singularly concerned with *self*-gratification, which nullifies the possibility of collective life (Marcuse 17-18). As such, proponents of the individual-civilizational model claim guilt as a necessary component of all social life, and advocate a generally positive view of guilt. On this model, guilt becomes an inescapable feeling for those who wish to live within a civilized social structure. Civilization, in turn, is promoted as the best possible life for human beings, as it is the only arrangement that can produce higher-order pleasures and prevent against the negative outcomes of instinctual gratification—namely, a quick and painful death (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 106).

While the individual-civilizational conception of guilt is not explicitly political, the denigration of instinctual gratification as a means of preserving a certain form of civilization produces an implicit politics. By linking individual experiences of guilt to the development of civilization as its very condition of possibility, theorists in this category make guilt into a useful tool for the preservation of a certain arrangement of social relations and norms, based upon a Western conception of what counts as rational cognition (Marcuse 18-20). A conservative political project of assimilation is thus implicitly advocated: because civilization (defined as a complex of rules, norms, and laws based upon Western rationality) is seen as the best possible arrangement of social life, and individual guilt is a necessary condition for the continuation of civilization, guilt

must be fostered in individuals in order to prevent the gratification of instinctual desires that would threaten civilization's continued existence (Smith, "The Political Meaning of Unconscious Guilt" 191-192). Fostering this sense of guilt involves assimilating individuals to the norms and laws of civilization and requires that individuals progress down the path of "normal" or "healthy" psychological development. In turn, normal psychological development is seen as dependent upon the proper organization of the family and social institutions around figures of authority capable of prompting the development of psychological guilt (Marcuse 47-50, 79-84).

Additionally, because an *excess* of guilt is read as pathological and disruptive to the individual's ability to assimilate into civilized society, the individual-civilizational model also advocates for therapeutic interventions designed to reduce pathological guilt to a normal level, which serves to realign the individual with the average circulations of life within civilization. These interventions are believed to be necessary for both the continuation of civilization and the health and happiness of the individual (Smith, "The Political Meaning of Unconscious Guilt" 187-88). The implicit politics of the individual-civilizational theory of guilt thus constitutes a form of what Foucault will term *biopolitics*, insofar as the psychological health of the population becomes a politically important target for intervention and regulation.

The differences between the individual-civilizational theory of guilt and my own project arise primarily because the theorists in this vein make several assumptions that I will work to problematize. First, while the individual-civilizational branch of theory takes the psychological assimilation of civilization's norms for granted as the basic condition for the existence of society, my project will question the necessity of this assimilation by

reading it as a form of *domination* and voluntary servitude. By failing to question or acknowledge how norms work to the benefit of some individuals over others (i.e., those who can more easily fit within their boundaries), the individual-civilizational theorists also fail to account for how these norms (and the guilt they produce) create the unequal distributions of power that become domination once they are codified and made habitual. This thesis, by contrast, will work to show how the guilt that is provoked by normative standards produces domination as the crystallization of unequal power relations by passionately attaching guilty individuals to a specific form of social organization—namely, the State.

By relying on a generic conception of “civilization” that is believed to be universally applicable to all cultures and social collectives, the individual-civilizational strain of theory ignores the ways in which guilt is dependent upon *specific* social conditions that mutate and change over time. It is thus insufficient for explaining how particular, historically situated social formations work to produce guilt for specific purposes. In the next chapter, I will examine the particular mode of socialization that produces guilt through a reading of Nietzsche, who argues that guilt should be viewed as the product of fundamentally unequal relations of power. As these relations come to be codified within a political collective (i.e., the State), guilt becomes a means of reproducing dominant arrangements of power by ensuring the obedience of the majority to a small and powerful minority. By decontextualizing the particularly political aspects of guilt’s production through a generic conception of civilization, the individual-civilizational theory covers over the unequal power relations upon which the social formations of “civilization” depend, and that produce (and are subsequently reproduced

by) guilt. As such, it fails to address guilt's role in maintaining a social arrangement of power that benefits some over others, which will be the main point of investigation for this thesis.

Furthermore, by failing to acknowledge guilt's intimate relation to *debt*, this line of theory is of little use for understanding the types of political work that guilt prompts today, or how it functions to attach individuals to dominant formations of power within the contemporary era of neoliberal debt economies. My project, by contrast, will focus on this connection between debt and guilt as a way to account for guilt's political uses within a particular social arrangement, namely the neoliberal State.

## 1.4 The Collective-National Theory of Guilt

The next thematic category of theory that we must examine is the *collective-national* theory of guilt. This group of theorists is concerned primarily with how guilt arises or can be attributed within delimited political collectives that can encompass large groups of individuals, such as nations or States, or within particular socio-historical conditions that affect specific groups of people. However, given the widely differing views of the theorists within this category, the collective-national line of theory must be further divided into two divergent groups of theorists based on the traditions of political thought they draw from. These two groups are the *liberal-philosophical* group and the *psychoanalytic-Marxists*.

### 1.4.1 The Liberal-Philosophical Conception

I will start with the liberal-philosophical theory of guilt's relation to politics. I have termed this strain of theory the liberal-philosophical conception for its strong



connection to the classical liberal tradition of political philosophy—particularly as regards the separation of private and public spheres—and its propensity for making formal distinctions that are primarily philosophical, rather than sociological or psychological. As such, theorists in this vein are concerned with guilt as a conceptual category, rather than as an emotion or psychological condition.

Though the proponents of the liberal-philosophical conception of guilt tend to draw on traditions of political philosophy that far precede the twentieth century, this body of theory arose primarily as a response to the Second World War. The most prominent theorists of the liberal-philosophical conception were Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, but their work on guilt has been taken up more recently by theorists such as Iris Marion Young.<sup>6</sup>

These theorists take as their common focus the issue of *collective* guilt, particularly as it arises within the context of the modern nation-state. Specifically, theorists in the liberal-philosophical vein recognize that the ability to properly attribute guilt or responsibility for major world events is complicated by the existence of political collectives and forms of structural injustice, which appear to act and cause effects beyond the intention of individual subjects, while in reality being nothing more than the collective culmination of individual actions (or inaction) (Marion Young 40-45, 52-60). In the face of such collective actions and their effects, how should responsibility be attributed? Are the leaders of political collectives responsible for their cumulative actions, or should the individual people who constitute the collective each be held

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<sup>6</sup> See particularly “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” and “Collective Responsibility” by Hannah Arendt, *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000) by Karl Jaspers, and *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) by Iris Marion Young.

responsible for the effects of the whole, even if they did not directly contribute to producing those effects? Such questions can be traced back quite far in the history of political theory—to at least the conquests of the Roman Empire (Jaspers 41-42)—but become especially pressing within the context of modern nation-states, which are capable of producing massive global effects and of mobilizing destructive forces unprecedented in the previous history of humanity, without requiring the consent or direct participation of the majority of citizens (Arendt, “Organized Guilt” 264). These destructive effects were most prominently demonstrated in the mid-twentieth century by the atrocities committed on all sides during the two World Wars, which motivated many theorists to question who was ultimately guilty for such atrocities (Arendt, “Organized Guilt” 255-256). More recent lines of inquiry within the liberal-philosophical tradition have focused on issues of guilt in relation to the structural injustices that occur *within* nation-states. Specifically, these theorists question who should be considered guilty or responsible for the effects of structural injustices that have multiple causes and often arise from the unintentional, mundane actions of entire populations (Marion Young 41-61).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Iris Marion Young, for example, analyzes the structural factors that contribute to housing insecurity and homelessness, including “condo conversion...; the high cost of rental housing, combined with the demand for a three-month security deposit; the need to live near transportation [to work] and in a neighborhood where...children will be safe and have good schools to go to; [and] a sex-segregated labor market that makes low-wage service jobs the primary option for women without college degrees” (Marion Young xiii). She concludes that, while some of the factors leading to individual cases of homelessness and housing insecurity can be directly attributed to individuals (for example, the decisions of slumlords who refuse to rent to certain types of individuals), many other factors cannot, as they are the result of intersecting decisions, forms of legislation, and simple luck. This requires us to shift from a “liability model” of attributing responsibility (which focuses on the conscious actions of individuals) to what she calls a “social connection model” which “finds that all those who contribute by their actions to structural processes with some unjust outcomes share responsibility for the injustice” (Marion Young 96).

In response to such issues, liberal-philosophical theorists have attempted to understand the possibility of guilt at the collective or national level, and to create formal categories to govern the attribution of blame (Jaspers 21-23). Starting from the classical liberal distinction between the public and private spheres of social affairs, they believe that the feeling of guilt, as a private emotional experience, is (or should be) *irrelevant for politics*, and that guilt as an objective or legal category can only be applicable to *individuals* based on their actions (Marion Young 82-84).<sup>8</sup> On this account, it is impossible to talk of *collective* guilt—the guilt of whole peoples or nations (Arendt, “Collective Responsibility” 45-47). In the case of injustices perpetrated by political collectives, only the few whose actions directly contribute to those injustices can be considered guilty, and this guilt can have nothing to do with private feelings, being solely a legal category (Arendt, “Organized Guilt” 260-261).

For the liberal-philosophical theorists, it is important to foreclose the possibility of collective guilt because “[w]here all are guilty, nobody in the last analysis can be judged” (Arendt, “Organized Guilt” 261) and all must be considered innocent, allowing those who are *actually* responsible to escape culpability. Furthermore, guilt feelings must be excluded from considerations of responsibility for political wrongs, as these feelings may arise over actions one has not directly taken, or, conversely, may not be experienced

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<sup>8</sup> For an explanation of how the liberal public/private division relates to emotion more generally, we may turn to Andrew A.G. Ross, who explains that

the liberal tradition assumes that the only thing we need to know about emotions is that, to build a well-ordered political system, we in fact need not know much about them at all. This liberal prejudice views emotions as symptoms of impaired reasoning: as private afflictions, they should not be allowed to infect the neutral deliberations of the public sphere. The flip side of the liberal view of normal political conduct is a diagnosis of abnormal conduct that points the finger at emotion...The assumption is that, while modern, liberal societies mediate conflict through the rule of law, weak states and traditional cultures are mired in emotional battles over identity (127).

by those who are objectively responsible (Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 251). It is thus seen as imperative that guilt be conceptualized as an objective or legal category, attributable only to specific actions performed by individuals.

This conception of guilt aligns with classical liberal theories of the role of emotions in politics, which view “emotions as symptoms of impaired reasoning: as private afflictions, they should not be allowed to infect the neutral deliberations of the public sphere” (Ross 127). For theorists in the liberal-philosophical vein, guilt should only constitute an abstract or conceptual category used to single out individuals who are guilty of legal and moral crimes, and must be evacuated of its emotional content (Arendt, “Collective Responsibility” 43). This is because *feelings* of guilt may arise even when one is objectively not responsible for any wrongdoing, and are therefore inadequate for singling out culpable individuals. On this conception, it is only a metaphor to say that one “feels” guilty for others, as expressing guilt for others’ actions is a sentimental gesture that obscures real political issues and confuses the attribution of responsibility (Marion Young 76-77). Additionally, feeling guilty when one has done nothing wrong can allow an individual to “escape from the pressure of very present and actual problems into a cheap sentimentality” (Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 251), which prevents one from rationally thinking through who is actually responsible for the events that have prompted their guilt feelings. Guilt can therefore only enter the arena of public affairs as a politically viable concept when it is conceptualized as a legal or objective category, evacuated of its affective components, and is applicable only to individuals, not to collectives.

However, liberal-philosophical theorists also recognize that the atrocities or injustices perpetrated by political collectives (such as nation-states) cannot be committed without the complicity of the majority of their population. This majority cannot be said to be objectively *guilty* for the crimes or injustices of their society, but this does not mean that they lack some share of the *responsibility* (Jaspers 70-72)—indeed, complicity with injustice requires that the majority of individuals conceptualize responsibility as being solely a function of guilt, and thus an entirely private affair (Arendt, “Organized Guilt” 264). In order to account for the complicity necessary for political wrongdoings, liberal-philosophical theorists make a formal division to distinguish guilt from *political responsibility* (Arendt, “Organized Guilt” 266-267).<sup>9</sup>

For these theorists, the category of political responsibility is not solely personal, but also public. Whereas guilt and morality are concerned with the self, politics is concerned with the world or community. In the political or public context, responsibility is not solely borne for what one does personally, but also for being part of a political

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<sup>9</sup> This division between guilt and political responsibility is Arendt’s, and can be found in her essay “Collective Responsibility”. For the sake of simplicity, I am taking her binary division as representative of the kinds of divisions made by liberal-philosophical theorists. The conceptual division between guilt and political responsibility is mirrored in the work of Karl Jaspers, who was similarly concerned with the attribution of guilt in post-war Germany, but divided guilt into four categories: *criminal*, *political*, *moral*, and *metaphysical* (25-26). While these categories provide slightly more nuance than Arendt’s stark division between guilt and political responsibility, they can be divided along two axes that correspond roughly to Arendt’s division—the *collective axis* and the *individual axis*. For Jaspers, on the collective level, each individual must take full responsibility for both the general injustices of the world through metaphysical guilt (Jaspers 25) and the specific actions of the political collective in which they live through political guilt (Jaspers 25), while on the individual level, each person must judge their own moral culpability through moral guilt (Jaspers 26) and be judged for their legal liability by a court of law through criminal guilt (Jaspers 25). On Jaspers’ account, guilt is politically relevant, but only insofar as it can either be attributed by the juridical apparatus of a State or taken up collectively for the actions of a State (56, 70-72). Individual, moral guilt is of no consequence for politics, as it can be judged and attributed only by the private individual to themselves (Jaspers 37). Jasper’s concept of collective guilt thus aligns with Arendt’s concept of political responsibility, while individual guilt remains equally irrelevant to politics for both theorists.

community (Marion Young 78). As such, one can be politically responsible for doing things that have indirectly contributed to political injustices (including inaction or passively going along with the crowd), even if one is not directly *guilty* for said injustices (Arendt, “Organized Guilt” 267). Whole populations or peoples can thus be said to be collectively *responsible* for acts committed by the State in which they reside, without being collectively *guilty* (Jaspers 55-56).<sup>10</sup>

This formal division between guilt and political responsibility, however, seems entirely philosophical or idealistic, with little bearing on reality. While the liberal-philosophical theorists do in passing acknowledge some of the detrimental political effects of guilt as an affective condition, their solution—to simply deny guilt a place in political life by making conceptual divisions—seems to ignore the nature of affect or emotion, which is not bound by philosophical categories, and cannot be fully separated from rational cognition (Ahmed 5-8). As such, the liberal-philosophical conception is unable to explain *why* individuals may come to feel guilty for deeds they did not directly commit, or *how* guilt may function to attach individuals to a certain arrangement of power. Because it relies on the classical liberal division between private and public and relegates all emotion (including guilt) to the non-political private realm, the liberal-philosophical theory simply ignores how emotions are *always already* involved in

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<sup>10</sup> For example, both Arendt and Jaspers considered all citizens of Germany living during the rise of the Third Reich to be *politically responsible* for the atrocities of the Holocaust, even if they weren’t directly *guilty* (i.e., they may not have been personally involved in the creation or operation of the concentration camps at any level, but were complicit in the crimes of the Nazi party by virtue of allowing Hitler to remain in power).

politics (Ross 21), and thus cannot provide a robust account of the particular political effects of guilt.

Moreover, by conceptualizing guilt feelings as an entirely individual experience, the liberal-philosophical theorists elide guilt's fundamentally *social* character (Tangney and Dearing 148-49). The fact that an individual's sense of guilt is necessarily prompted by, and thus oriented towards, *others* whom the individual has transgressed against is covered over by the strict conceptual divide between emotions and politics. While, on the liberal-philosophical conception, guilt is seen as having to do with the responsibility of guilty parties, theorists in this vein tend to be curiously silent on the issue of reparations for guilt, or the way that guilt not only implies a transgression, but also that something is *owed* to the party who has been transgressed against. As such, this strain of theory seems inadequate to account for the way that guilt attaches individuals to socio-political institutions or formations of power (like the State), or to address how guilt is instilled in the contemporary era through economies of debt.

#### 1.4.2 The Psychoanalytic-Marxist Conception

The second group of theorists who can be subsumed under the collective-national category are the *psychoanalytic-Marxists*. These theorists were also active primarily in the mid-twentieth century, but were motivated by different concerns. Rather than searching for the proper attribution of guilt for the wrongs perpetrated by defined political collectives (such as States), the psychoanalytic-Marxists were more concerned with the psychological effects of particular types of social and economic organization—specifically, the effects of late capitalism on mass and individual psychologies. This concern led them to theorize that guilt is the product of a particular, historically

contingent mode of social organization, and that the possibility exists to overcome guilt by reorganizing the fundamental elements of society.

The psychoanalytic-Marxist conception of guilt was formulated primarily by theorists of the Frankfurt School—most prominently, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm—and was drawn directly from the theories of Freudian psychoanalysis, as touched on in the previous discussion of civilizational-individual guilt.<sup>11</sup> For Freud, guilt is seen as the primary vehicle of social repression, resulting from conflicts between an individual's instinctual desires and the external norms and rules that they have assimilated in the process of psychological development. On the psychoanalytic-Marxist account, however, this repression (and, by extension, guilt) is not a *necessary* condition of society (Marcuse 4-6), but rather is the result of a specific arrangement of social and economic relations which it serves to maintain—namely, the domination of one class of people over another (Marcuse 36-39).

Rejecting Freud's "proposition that civilization is based on the *permanent* subjugation of the human instincts" and the idea that "[h]appiness *must* be subordinated to the discipline of work as full-time occupation, to the discipline of monogamic reproduction, to the established system of law and order" (Marcuse 4, emphasis added), theorists in the psychoanalytic-Marxist vein proposed that psychological repression of the human instincts must be situated and read *historically* as the result of contingent arrangements of the socio-economic forces of production. By interreading Freud's

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<sup>11</sup> See particularly *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955) and *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) by Herbert Marcuse, and *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud* (New York: Continuum, 1962) by Erich Fromm.



account of repression with Marx's progressive view of history, these theorists were able to argue that psychological repression is only the result of a *certain phase* in the history of class conflict, and is produced by the social domination of one economic class over another (Fromm 63-70).

Following Marx, the psychoanalytic-Marxists find that the modern phase of class domination is based on a division in the ownership of the means of economic production, whereby one class has managed to accumulate a monopoly on the tools, land, and capital necessary for the production of commodities and the necessities of life. This gives the ownership class power over individuals who do not own the means of production, and who are subsequently forced to sell their labour in order to produce and access commodities. However, because the products of the workers' labour are created using the means of production accumulated by the ownership class, these products must be given over to the ownership class and cannot be directly claimed by the workers who produced them. These products are then sold back to the workers who produced them at a profit to the ownership class, and a disconnection is subsequently inserted between the worker and the products of their labour, over which they cannot claim direct ownership. This disconnection thus constitutes an *alienation* of the worker from their own labour and its products (Fromm 36-37).

The sense of alienation that results from this division of economic production is read by the psychoanalytic-Marxists as a form of pathology or sickness that is suffered by the workers, one which can only be overcome by redistributing the means of production in such a way that workers are no longer alienated (Fromm 38). Such a redistribution would first require the dissolution of the class division between the ownership class and

the workers, and as a result, the workers come to resent the ownership class and to desire its abolition (Marcuse 99-101). However, because the ownership class has a desire to maintain control of the means of production as a way to enact power over the rest of society, they use their power to prevent the workers from reclaiming the means of production and to make the unequal distribution of resources seem natural and inevitable (Marcuse 18, 45-47). Forced to live within a social structure in which their alienation seems impossible to overcome, the workers must sublimate their desire for freedom from class domination and alienation through psychological repression, which, following Freud, the psychoanalytic-Marxists find to be experienced as a feeling of guilt (Marcuse 56-61, 79-80).

As the history of class domination progresses, the means of economic production become increasingly rationalized through the process of industrialization, requiring less and less input from individual subjects, which results in a greater sense of alienation on the part of the workers (Fromm 35-43). This increase in alienation in turn necessitates an increase in psychic repression and thus of guilt, which preserves the class domination upon which society is built against the potential revolt of the subjugated class. For the psychoanalytic-Marxists, this history of class conflict culminates in capitalism—the domination of the ownership class (the bourgeoisie) over the workers (the proletariat)—which also requires the most intense level of repression to sustain (Marcuse 97-101).

This is especially true of the late stages of capitalism, in which the development of industrial production has reached such a level that the basic needs of the entire human population could easily be met with only a minimal amount of human labour power. In order to preserve the unequal distribution of resources upon which capitalist class

domination depends, a vast amount of repression and guilt must be instilled in the workers, who would otherwise seek to achieve a more equitable distribution of resources by overturning the capitalist order. Guilt in turn works to prevent the workers from transgressing against the norms and laws of society that are organized to facilitate the continued functioning of the capitalist economy by causing psychological pain or discomfort in response to their natural impulses, which run counter to the inequitable ordering of society under capitalism. As this inequality becomes more pronounced, so too must the level of guilt and repression.

Conceptualizing repression (and subsequently guilt) as the historically contingent product of political collectives based on the unequal distribution of resources rather than as the necessary or inevitable result of life within civilization enabled the psychoanalytic-Marxists to anticipate the possibility of a *non-repressive society*, which would be free of guilt and domination (Marcuse 152-154). Following Marx's progressive view of history, such a non-repressive society was believed to be coterminous with the inevitable overthrow of capitalism and the refounding of society on the principles of socialism (Fromm 27). Because the psychoanalytic-Marxists viewed repression and domination as the result of a particular mode of organizing the social forces of production, they believed that achieving a non-repressive society would first necessitate the total reorganization of society based upon an equitable distribution of resources and labour (Marcuse 154-156). Such a redistribution of labour and material resources would mark the end of capitalist exploitation and class domination, and would thus also do away with the necessity for

psychic repression and guilt, as an equitable distribution of resources would allow for the full gratification of human desires and individual development.<sup>12</sup>

For the psychoanalytic-Marxists, guilt as means of psychic repression was thus seen as the product of a certain *type* of political-economic collective based on the principles of class domination and an unequal distribution of material resources that has reached its terminal point in capitalism. For these theorists, guilt is both the product and the tool of domination, and as such, should be done away with through collective forms of political action aimed at reclaiming the industrial forces of production and reorganizing society on the basis of socialism (Marcuse 157-158).

However, by linking guilt to the economic organization of capitalism in the mid-twentieth century, the psychoanalytic-Marxists did not anticipate the subsequent transformations of capitalist economy, wherein industrial production and labour has largely been replaced by precarious forms of service and intellectual labour, while “finance” as the production and circulation of privately created money and debt has become the dominant mode of capital accumulation (Lazzarato *GBD* 136-139).<sup>13</sup> The psychoanalytic-Marxists thus seem unable to provide a sufficient account of guilt’s function within the contemporary, neoliberal organization of economies around the circulation of *debt*. As I will examine in the third chapter of this thesis, the contemporary

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<sup>12</sup> This future possibility for a non-repressive society is what Marcuse famously terms “the Great refusal” (160) through which “Reactivation of polymorphous and narcissistic sexuality ceases to be a threat to culture and can itself lead to culture-building if the organism exists not as an instrument of alienated labor but as a subject of self-realization—in other words, if socially useful work is at the same time the transparent satisfaction of an individual need” (210).

<sup>13</sup> This is what Lazzarato describes as “the ‘liberation’ of capital from its Fordist institutions and...the transition from the hegemony of industrial capital (M-C-M’) to that of finance capital (M-M’), which involves an entirely different institutional configuration” (*GBD* 136).

neoliberal State primarily instills guilt through discourses of personal responsibility and forms of financial indebtedness rather than through the alienation and disciplinary technologies of industrial labour. As psychoanalytic-Marxist theories focus on the alienation and repression experienced by workers under conditions of industrial production and consumption, rather than the precarious, immaterial labour and circulations of financial debt that mark the neoliberal State and economy, the psychoanalytic-Marxist solution of reorganizing the material forces of production in a non-oppressive way does not seem adequate for addressing the contemporary organization of power.

Additionally, focusing on the mass redistribution of material resources as a means for overcoming political guilt requires that the psychoanalytic-Marxists ignore the ways in which guilt itself works to attach individuals to relations of domination as a means of preventing just such a reorganization of society. Within the psychoanalytic-Marxists' own theory, it would thus appear necessary to address guilt and repression *before* any social change could become possible. This would require greater attention to the particular ways in which guilt is instilled, and the specific means by which it attaches individuals to the powers that dominate them—issues which my own project will seek to address by examining how guilt relates to the process of *subjectivation*.

It should be noted that, of all the past interpretations of guilt's relation to politics, the psychoanalytic-Marxist conception is closest in kind and intention to my own project. Both the psychoanalytic-Marxist interpretation and this thesis focus on the way that guilt works to produce domination within a *particular* mode of social organization. However, whereas the psychoanalytic-Marxists link guilt to the organization of the industrial means

of production under capitalism, I will focus on guilt's relation to the State form of social relations, particularly in its current biopolitical and neoliberal manifestation. This will require a greater attention to the relation between guilt and *debt*. Moreover, my project will act as a partial corrective to the psychoanalytic-Marxist theory by addressing in greater detail how, particularly, guilt is instilled through the process of subjectivation, and how it works to produce voluntary servitude by attaching individuals to the powers that subject them. This analysis will be taken up primarily in the next chapter in the sections addressing Nietzsche's genealogy of guilt and Butler's conception of subjectivation.

## 1.5 The Fragmented-Individual Theory of Guilt

The final category of theory pertaining to the relation between guilt and politics is the category of *fragmented-individual* guilt. This branch of theory is a relatively recent development, arising primarily out of the fragmentation of socio-political formations that has taken place since the late 1960s as part of the general neoliberal strategy of *privatization*. The increased privatization of various aspects of social life has prompted a turn away from conceptualizing political and economic issues as being the product of complex social forces (such as the nation or the organization of economic production) and towards viewing political matters as entirely private affairs, resulting from the decisions of autonomous individuals (Marion Young 4-5). Individuals are in turn believed to be wholly responsible for their own position and circumstances within the social collective, and are encouraged to pursue individualized solutions to political problems (Nadesan 32-34).

In the neoliberal worldview, the individual is seen as (ideally) autonomous and self-determining, rather than being the product of social forces, and should thus be let alone as much as possible. This is usually framed in economic terms, but also has political implications. Promoting the autonomous and self-determining individual as the proper end of governance, the goal of politics under neoliberalism becomes to govern only as much as is required to produce an environment in which individuals can freely pursue their own interests, preferably through economic means (Foucault *BoB* 146-47). In turn, responsibility for the outcome of this pursuit of interests is found to rest solely with individuals themselves, and thus should not be mediated by the social collective. As such, neoliberal ideology discourages State or political intervention as a means of ameliorating the effects of social inequalities, which are believed to be the natural result of people's competing interests (Nadesan 32-33). Rather, the autonomous individual is left to pursue their own private means of correcting these inequalities, and is encouraged to do so within an economic frame of reference, through the purchase of privatized goods and services.<sup>14</sup> Issues that would have once been considered a public concern to be dealt with collectively are thus recast as wholly the purview and responsibility of private individuals (Marion Young 9-11).

The fragmented-individual conception of guilt is largely prompted by this neoliberal turn towards privative understandings of political issues, and constitutes a reaction against any interpretation of guilt that would link individual guilt to socio-

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that these individualized economic solutions to social inequalities primarily take the form of *debt*. Under neoliberalism, taking out personal loans from private lenders as a means of supplementing income and accessing both consumer goods and basic necessities has become the primary means for addressing social inequities. This phenomenon will be examined in further detail in Chapter 3.

political arrangements or events. More specifically, the fragmented-individual strain reacts against conceiving guilt as a social category *at all*. For theorists who fall within this tradition, guilt is understood to be an entirely private phenomenon that should only be experienced over wrongs committed specifically by the individual. Similarly, responsibility should be borne by individuals only for their own deeds, not for past wrongs or structural injustices (Bruckner 216, 220-221), and the individual should take on personal responsibility for their own social position or condition (Marion Young 11-18). The fragmented-individual theory must thus be distinguished from the liberal-philosophical conception insofar as *both* guilt and responsibility are believed to be wholly private affairs. This leads to a subsequent emphasis on pursuing personal or private solutions for alleviating guilt and repairing social wrongs through forms of economic consumption, rather than the taking on of collective forms of political responsibility as a means of correcting social injustices.

Furthermore, for the fragmented-individual theorist, guilt is seen as an impediment to personal development. Guilt can tie the individual to others by making them responsible towards people who have been wronged or suffered some form of injustice. But the ties of responsibility create certain restrictions for the guilty individual, and it is these restrictions that the fragmented-individual theorists wish to eschew. Taking the autonomous, self-determining individual as the beginning and end of politics, guilt must be denied a place in political considerations for the fragmented-individual theorists, as it prevents the flourishing of individual freedom and the pursuit of interests.

However, while the fragmented-individual conception of political guilt largely draws from the development of neoliberal theory, its origins can be traced back to the



1960s countercultural movement in North America, which arose as a response to various political failures of the twentieth century—particularly the two World Wars, the American military intervention into Vietnam, and continued discrimination against minority groups. These failures created a diffused sense of guilt over past and present atrocities, along with a distinct sense that normative Western culture—particularly, its promotion of humanism and rationalism—and conventional State politics could no longer provide a viable future for humanity (Amato 137). In this context, many people began to see no possibility for a politics that would not lead to abuses by the State (Amato 125-28).

The feeling of guilt and disgust over the past failures of Western civilization spawned various countercultural movements that sought to find new possibilities for the future by rejecting all past traditions and norms, which often involved a certain move towards irrationalism and self-directed development (Amato 166).<sup>15</sup> As part of this rejection of the past, many branches of the counterculture attacked *guilt itself* as something holding them back from their future potential. Feelings of guilt over events in the past, they believed, only served to tie them to those events and their causes (the traditions and norms that the counterculture was attempting to escape) (Amato 138). In response, many individuals began to reject any sense of guilt over the past and present atrocities of Western civilization, seeing guilt feelings as an impediment to life, self-fulfillment, and political alternatives (Amato 137-166).

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<sup>15</sup> For a typical work in this vein of irrationalism, see *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966) by Norman O. Brown.

In the intervening decades since the countercultural movements of the 1960s, the fragmented-individual theory of guilt has been taken up more blatantly as a means of critiquing various claims to social justice made by the “victims” or “minorities” of normative Western culture (Gottfried 14). Theorists in this vein generally view guilt as being mobilized by certain groups of individuals (usually those who are aligned with “minority” group identities) against *other* groups of individuals (those who identify with “normative” group identities) in order to shut down certain possibilities for acting and speaking, thereby preventing free self-determination (Gottfried 47-48).<sup>16</sup> On this conception, guilt is viewed as a political weapon—one that is wielded by the historically victimized or disenfranchised against the historical victimizers. Discourses aimed at promoting tolerance and multiculturalism, along with claims made by minority groups regarding the ongoing deleterious effects of racism, colonization, misogyny, and homophobia, are read as a way to blame certain groups of people (whites, men, heterosexuals) for the negative effects of past injustices<sup>17</sup> in order to evoke feelings of

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<sup>16</sup> For the purposes of this section, I will be taking Pascal Bruckner’s *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Paul Edward Gottfried’s *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Toward a Secular Theocracy* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002) as representative of this strain of theory. For other works in this vein, see *Not Guilty: The Case in Defense of Men* (William Morrow & Co, 1993) by David Thomas, and *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (Harper Perennial, 2007) by Shelby Steele.

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that, on these conceptions, the present reality of injustices like racism, misogyny, or homophobia are generally either ignored or relegated to the past. For example, Bruckner implies that in North America, responsibility for “the Indian genocide, slavery, and persistent segregation” was overcome through “Lyndon Johnson’s Civil Rights Act, which put an official end to racial discrimination” (90), and that further claims to racial discrimination or requests for reparation should not evoke feelings of guilt or further forms of reparative action. This allows him to claim that guilt functions solely as a way to attach us to the negative aspects of the past, which restrain individuals from acting in the present (168-169), and could be better overcome through a project of assimilation, rather than tolerance or difference (163).

*guilt* (Gottfried 84-86). These feelings of guilt, in turn, work to pacify normative individuals, leading them to accept increased restrictions on their freedom, either in the form of self-imposed flagellation and behavioural changes (Bruckner 14-15), or State interventions such as hate crime legislation (Gottfried 47-49).<sup>18</sup> Guilt thus becomes a constraint on the historically privileged or normative subjects of Western civilization, and functions as a way of displacing “traditional” values in favour of an empty or unjustified “tolerance” of the victims of past oppression (Gottfried 8-15).

Theorists in this vein believe that an unjustified inversion of power has taken place at the global political level. They contend that this inversion of power allows non-Western or non-normative subjects—the historically “victimized” or disenfranchised—to enact power with impunity, while the normative subjects of the West—the historical “victimizers”—are constrained from acting (Bruckner 149-153). For the fragmented-individual theorist, the vehicle of this inversion of power is the mobilization of *guilt*, which constrains historically privileged subjects from action. This guilt, in turn, has been imposed through the development of the multicultural State in the West (Gottfried 14-15), liberal discourses of tolerance (Gottfried 75), political “privileging” of the

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Gottfried claims that:

The relevant political-moral attitude is an ostentatious guilt about the historical past that the majority society is supposed to exhibit. This guilt is apparent whether one looks at Germans erecting Holocaust monuments to real Jewish victims, or to smaller, less certifiable numbers of victimized gay men, or to lesbian nonvictims. The same cultural trend seems to be at work when American Protestant organizations launch expiatory marches across Europe and the Middle East seeking to apologize to descendants of Muslim and Jewish victims of the Crusades...crucial to the custodians of political correctness is the maintenance of a contrite mood that serves social reform. This priority operates equally in the Anglophone world, where ‘sensitivity’ often has greater value than truth claims. Sensitivity requires that members of the majority society give special consideration to the self-esteem of those considered as disadvantaged or victimized. In the United States hate crime legislation is widely accepted, on the explicit assumption that a much higher percentage of interracial violence originates among whites and Asians than among blacks (47-48).

historically disenfranchised and exploited through acts of reparation (Bruckner 148-153), and the implementation of hate crime legislation (Gottfried 48). In these theories, the inversion of power through guilt is viewed as politically dangerous, as it allows some individuals to act with impunity based on their affiliation with historically subjugated groups, while others are restricted from acting by being held responsible for past injustices. For example, Bruckner claims that:

Minorities, in proportion to the wrongs that have been inflicted on them, have acquired a prerogative that used to be peculiar to the bourgeoisie: unmitigated egoism and the pleasure of self-satisfaction. They noisily proclaim their personalities...recognize no defect in themselves, authorize no challenge, and are even sometimes exempted from the common laws...We have transferred to minorities the privileges forbidden to the dominant classes and to nations (149-150)

For theorists in the fragmented-individual vein, this amounts to a new kind of domination based on reverse racism (Gottfried 35-36), wherein the historically dominant classes may be endlessly punished for their guilt through the payment of reparations (often in the form of legislation aimed at correcting discriminatory policies and inequalities, such as affirmative action), while individuals belonging to minority groups are situated beyond reproach, no matter their actions (Bruckner 147-151). In response, these theorists advocate a privative understanding of guilt and responsibility, whereby individuals are held personally responsible for their own actions, and not for injustices of the past or present to which they have not directly contributed. Such a shift would work to ameliorate the power dynamics inherent in guilt by preventing individuals from being

punished for the crimes of their forebears or for social inequities that cannot be directly attributed to them.

A wholesale rejection of guilt and responsibility for social inequalities in favour of a privative model of personal responsibility is therefore advocated by the fragmented-individual theorists as a means of reclaiming autonomous self-determination (Bruckner 220-221). The problem with this rejection of guilt is that, in reality, it extends only to those normative Western subjects who are *already in a privileged position*, while those who have been historically injured or victimized continue to be held responsible and guilty for the disadvantages they suffer due to their social position.<sup>19</sup> As Iris Marion Young has indicated, the fragmented-individual conception of guilt based on personal responsibility is already in circulation in the West, where neoliberal forms of governmentality predominate (3-5). However, discourses of personal responsibility tend to focus only on the responsibility of the socially disadvantaged, and work to shift the blame for structural injustices onto those who are most affected by them. Focusing on the ways in which impoverished individuals are viewed as responsible for their own poverty,<sup>20</sup> she notes that

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<sup>19</sup> This double standard leads Pascal Bruckner to make the highly incongruous statement that:

We must have done with the blackmail of culpability, cease to sacrifice ourselves to our persecutors...Once we have recognized any faults we may have, then the prosecution must turn against the accusers and subject them to constant criticism as well... Let us inject in others a poison that has long gnawed away at us: shame. A little guilty conscience in Teheran, Riyadh, Karachi, Moscow, Beijing, Havana, Caracas, Algiers, Damascus, Rangoon, Harare, and Khartoum, to mention them alone, would do these governments, and especially their people, a lot of good (220-221).

<sup>20</sup> Of course, poverty is also closely tied to race, ethnicity, gender, and disability. As a 2013 report from the US Census Bureau indicates, “The poverty rate for non-Hispanic Whites was 9.6 percent in 2013...[while] [f]or Blacks, the 2013 poverty rate was 27.2 percent” (Denavas-Walt and Proctor 12). Similarly, in Canada “in 2010, the rate of poverty among new immigrants was 17.6%...almost twice the overall poverty rate for

Implicitly [discourses of personal responsibility assume] that everyone else properly discharges their responsibilities and that the poor in particular act in deviant ways that unfairly force others to incur costs. The discourse of personal responsibility fails to acknowledge the many ways that some middle-class and rich people behave irresponsibly. It assumes a misleading ideal that each person can be independent of others and internalize the costs of their own actions. It ignores how the institutional relations in which we act render us deeply interdependent (Marion Young 4).

This is a result of the fragmented-individual theorists' reliance on both the neoliberal fetishization of personal autonomy, as well as its tendency to conceptualize individual autonomy and interest in *economic* terms, which tends to reduce all social relations to relations of equivalence and exchange through the medium of money. As Sara Ahmed notes, this reduction of social relations to relations of equivalence tends to allow the historically privileged to more easily claim narratives of injury that serve to reinforce their privileged position, because "all forms of injury are assumed to involve relations of innocence and guilt, and...it is assumed that responsibility for all injuries can be attributed to an individual...Given that subjects have an unequal relation to entitlement, then more privileged subjects will have a greater recourse to narratives of injury" (32-33).

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Canada" while the poverty rate for people with disabilities was 13.6%, and "[t]he rate of poverty among Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve was 15.2%...compared to 9.0% for all of Canada" (Citizens for Public Justice 14-15).

The fragmented-individual conception of guilt thus works to reinforce, rather than critique, the current organization of power. By focusing on how guilt is produced within the *privileged* individual by the realities of social inequity and the claims of minority groups, theorists in the fragmented-individual category ignore how guilt also works to create and maintain those very social inequities to begin with. Additionally, focusing on a purely individual escape from guilt also serves to reinforce current relations of power and domination, by allowing those already in privileged positions a greater chance to escape guilt and responsibility for social injustices, while placing the burden of responsibility on those who suffer the brunt of those injustices (Marion Young 3-5). As such, fragmented-individual theories of guilt reproduce relations of domination, and are thus inadequate to account for guilt's role in relations of voluntary servitude.

Furthermore, by focusing solely on the ways that guilt works to injure privileged or normative subjects, the fragmented-individual theorists generally ignore any connection between guilt and debt, as privileged subjects are generally less likely to be affected by the burden of financial debts (Soederberg 70-73). As a result, these theorists elide considerations as to how guilt can be instilled in individuals through the circulation of financial debt as a biopolitical mechanism of control, and do not address how neoliberal economies themselves work to produce guilt.

Therefore, while both the fragmented-individual conception and my own project focus on the political ramifications of guilt within the neoliberal period, I will approach the problem from an opposing angle, working to show how guilt functions as a *mechanism of neoliberalism itself*, rather than as a hindrance to its political objectives.

## 1.6 Conclusion

As I have indicated through this chapter, while the problem of political guilt is not necessarily new or novel, past interpretations of the link between guilt and politics fall short of accounting for its role in producing voluntary servitude in the contemporary era of neoliberal debt economies and biopolitical States. In the following chapters, I will endeavor to correct this gap in the theory of political guilt, starting from a reading of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* that will endeavor to show how guilt, as an affective condition arising from "the oldest and most primitive relationship between human beings, that of buyer and seller, creditor and debtor" (*GM* 202) and instilled through the social mobilization of punishment and responsibility, can be used as a mechanism of political control. This interpretation of guilt will then be reread through the lens of Foucault's work on biopower and biopolitics and Butler's theory of subjectivation to show how guilt is mobilized by the modern State, not through the mobilization of disciplinary punishments, but through the strategic deployment of norms that guide the process of subjectivation towards producing guilty subjects, whose guilt motivates them to willingly subjugate themselves to State domination, thereby producing the phenomena of voluntary servitude. The biopolitical norms that produce guilty subjects in the contemporary era of neoliberal States will, in turn, be delimited in the final chapter of this thesis, which will account for the role of *debt* in the political mobilization of guilt by examining how guilt is instilled in neoliberal States through the circulation of discourses of personal responsibility and the proliferation of forms of financial debt.



## Chapter 2

### 2 Guilt as Biopolitical Mechanism of Control

It has become painfully apparent that we are living in a world of infinite debts. Some of us will never pay off our student loans. Others will be making life-long payments on consumer debt, and insofar as we are imbricated in a world economy and State system that functions on the circulation of financial debt, we are all infinitely indebted before what Maurizio Lazzarato has called “the Universal Creditor” of capital (*MOIM* 7-8).

But this situation is not so new. Nietzsche had already identified it as one of the basic conditions of human sociality when in the second essay of his *Genealogy of Morals* he outlined a history of humanity’s subjectivation, whereby “the oldest and most primitive relationship between human beings, that of buyer and seller, creditor and debtor” (202) has been distilled to its highest potency as what he terms the “bad conscience” of *guilt*—a mechanism for “self-discipline, self-surveillance, [and] self-conquest” (265), instilled in the majority by a powerful minority for the maintenance of control.

If we do not wish to remain indebted forever, it is necessary to understand how the internalization of guilt as “bad conscience” makes us complicit in our own subjugation and the structural injustices that surround us. Starting from a reading of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, this chapter will establish the theoretical framework for my project by examining how the production of guilt as an affective perception of infinite indebtedness is mobilized by the State as a biopolitical mechanism for the perpetual maintenance of currently existing relations of power.

Subsequently, this chapter will be divided into four sections. In the first section, I will offer my particular reading of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, focusing on his account of guilt as an affective mechanism of subjection that results in the production of the subject of bad conscience to the exclusion of other forms of subjectivity. I will also draw on Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's work in order to support and supplement my reading in this section. The second section will offer an explanatory account of Foucault's conception of biopower and biopolitics as the predominant mode of governance and State control in the modern period, delimiting the particular features of these categories and reading them as an extension of the project of subjectivation outlined by Nietzsche. The third section will be devoted to examining Butler's account of subjectivation as the subject's primary submission to an external power, and the effects of bad conscience as maintaining the subject in a relation of submission to the power that subjects them. I will then, in the fourth and final section of this chapter, attempt to synthesize these theories into an account of guilt as a biopolitical mechanism of control which, when instilled through the process of subjectivation, is used to encourage voluntary servitude by producing obedient subjects who will actively maintain the State form of power relations, thereby reproducing their own domination while simultaneously securing the State as a form of sociality.

## 2.1 Nietzsche, Guilt, and Bad Conscience

In the second essay of his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche outlines a brief history of guilt as a moral affect used in the training, habituation, and subjectivation of individuals. For Nietzsche, the long pre-history of humanity is marked by a brutally violent and vulgar process of domestication. This is the "species activity" of humanity,

which elsewhere Nietzsche identifies as “culture” (Deleuze *NP* 108) or the “custom character of morals” (Nietzsche *GM* 190), and which constitutes a training and selection of the life-affirming aspects of humanity against the purely reactive and nihilistic forces that may come to possess human beings. It is the process whereby the human species reaches the point at which it is possible to produce a person of responsibility—a subject who has been rendered “up to a certain point regular, uniform, equal among equals, calculable” (Nietzsche *GM* 190)—who is capable of being responsible as a precondition for living sociably with others. More importantly, however, this long process of culture produces, at its terminal point, another mode of subjectivity—the free individual, capable of making and keeping promises (acts of will for which the promising subject acts as their own guarantor).

But reaching this terminal point of culture first involves creating for the human species a capacity for memory, “a continuing to will what has once been willed, a veritable ‘memory of the will’” (Nietzsche *GM* 190)—a capacity not only to draw lines of cause and effect between acts willed in the past and the effects they produce, but also the ability to project into the future through imagination, anticipate a future effect to be produced, and create a causal “chain of will” to achieve that effect. On Nietzsche’s account, this capacity for memory is produced through the use of “mnemotechnics” (192)—an intense, violent, and brutal “labour man accomplished upon himself over a vast period of time” (190)—and has the positive consequence of producing “the sovereign individual, equal only to himself, all moral custom left far behind” who is “autonomous, more than moral...[and develops] his own, independent, long-range will, which dares to make promises” (191).

At their most general, these mnemotechnics all take the form of *responsibility*—responsibility for one’s actions within a community and a framework of moral customs—based on “the oldest and most primitive relationship between human beings, that of buyer and seller, creditor and debtor” (*GM* 202). Through the species activity of culture, an economy of punishment is established in pre-historic societies based on “the notion that for every damage there could somehow be found an equivalent, by which that damage might be compensated—if necessary in the pain of the doer” (Nietzsche *GM* 195). Having caused a “damage” by transgressing a moral custom, the individual incurs a debt which must be repaid to the one who was damaged—a debt that is repaid not through monetary means, but through the suffering of violent punishment. This punishment, and the threat of future punishment for moral transgressions, works to train the individual in responsibility by establishing causal connections between the individual’s actions and the consequences or effects of those actions. While this economy of punishment has as its origins the interpersonal relationship between individual creditors and debtors, it is eventually abstracted to the relationship between individual and community, thus forming the concepts of law and justice.

Through the economy of punishment, species activity therefore serves to train the human species in responsibility—a training in obedience, not to *specific* laws, but to the generic “law of obeying laws” (Deleuze *NP* 133)—forming as its product an individual capable of being responsible before the judgment of others. This is the lawful individual, the obedient subject who knows the rules and can follow them, is capable of drawing causal relations between acts and consequences, takes responsibility for their judgments and actions, and thereby possesses the ability to account for themselves within the moral

framework of their community. However, this *responsible* being is not the ultimate goal of culture as species activity, but only a necessary intermediary step towards producing a different mode of subjectivity—a subject capable both of promising, and of moving beyond the laws that produced them.

Paradoxically, responsibility produces both humanity's *subjection* (as obedience to laws, morals, and justice) and its *liberation*. For Nietzsche, the potential for human liberation is tied to responsibility's capacity to also produce *conscience* as the "proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege responsibility confers," which penetrates the subject deeply and becomes "a dominant instinct" (*GM* 191). This "dominant instinct" is what the individual subject experiences as their conscience, and allows the individual to "pledge for [their] own future as a guarantor does" (Nietzsche *GM* 190) in a social world shared with others. Insofar as the responsible individual can also become the subject of conscience, they may develop into the "possessor of a long-range, pertinacious will" and of "a scale of values. Viewing others from the center of [their] being, [the subject of conscience] either honors or disdains [others]" (Nietzsche *GM* 191). In such instances, "[r]esponsibility as responsibility before the law, law as the law of justice, justice as the means of culture—all this disappears in the product of culture itself. The morality of customs, the spirit of the laws, produces the man emancipated from the law" (Deleuze *NP* 137)—who Nietzsche calls the "sovereign individual," capable of creating and legislating their own values to themselves, rather than following the law of the community. The sovereign individual, then, is one who is capable of moving *beyond* the conditions of their own production—punishment, morality, obedience to laws, and responsibility. Nietzsche calls this type of individual "truly free" (*GM* 191).

However, such individuals are rarely (if ever) produced. Rather, the species activity of humanity has constantly and consistently been diverted away from producing the sovereign individual, while its instruments of training (punishment, responsibility) have been used to produce a wholly different type of being: the individual of *bad conscience*. For Nietzsche, both conscience and bad conscience spring from the same moment of subjection to the mnemotechnics of culture. But unlike the subject of conscience, who is capable of moving beyond the conditions of their own production, the subject of bad conscience remains in a position of infinite subjection in relation to the “higher” powers of law and justice responsible for their initial and continued existence. This diversion of species activity away from the production of the sovereign individual, and towards the production of bad conscience, is the entry of culture into *history*, which represents the process by which “[s]pecies activity disappears into the night of the past as its product does into the night of the future” (Deleuze *NP* 138).

But how, specifically, is species activity diverted? And what features constitute the being of bad conscience? Both the diversion of culture into history and the production of bad conscience arise from the same moment—the entry of human beings into the State as a form of sociality and an environment of subjectivation.

According to Nietzsche, the State form of sociality was imposed violently upon the majority by a tyrannical minority—“a pack of savages, a race of conquerors...fiercely dominating a population perhaps vastly superior in numbers yet amorphous and nomadic” (219). However, in order to conform to the State form of social relations imposed upon them, it was necessary for the majority to repress their natural inclinations

for freedom—their will to power—turning these inclinations against themselves into an internalized bad conscience.

Forced to live within the confines of an externally imposed set of norms, laws, and prohibitions, the majority turned their own inclinations and will for freedom upon themselves as a constant self-beratement. This is because, “[a]ll instincts that are not allowed free play turn inward. This is what I call man’s interiorization... The formidable bulwarks by means of which the polity protected itself against the ancient instincts of freedom (punishment was one of the strongest of these bulwarks) caused those wild, extravagant instincts to turn in upon man” (*GM* 217-218).<sup>21</sup> This “interiorization” produces *bad conscience*, “the desire for self-mortification” (Nietzsche 221), which manifests as a painful affective perception of *guilt* for one’s own inclinations and a sense of duty towards the State, aligning the individual subject into conformity with the externally imposed norms of the power that subjects them.

The State thus uses culture’s instruments of training and selection, but not in order to produce the sovereign individual of conscience who would move beyond the State, its laws and hierarchies, thereby rendering it superfluous, but rather as a way to maintain itself *against* the sovereign individual. In order to achieve this end, it becomes necessary for the State to produce obedient, domesticated, “docile” subjects, who will maintain

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<sup>21</sup> It may be noted that the “formidable bulwarks” described here by Nietzsche as the cause of bad conscience are those same instruments of training and selection mobilized by culture for the purpose of forming the being of conscience—namely, punishment and responsibility. What, then, distinguishes the State’s use of these “bulwarks” from that of species activity? Simply put: culture uses these instruments in such a way as to make them (and, by extension, the whole violent process of culture) unnecessary, whereas the State uses them as a means to perpetuate and reproduce itself and the oppressive relations of power that mark it as a social form (thereby permanently extending the need for its violent means—punishment and responsibility) (Deleuze *NP* 138).

themselves permanently as *responsible* beings, rather than becoming sovereign individuals capable of creating their own values, and thus becoming independent of the State as a source of rules and norms. This goal, in turn, necessitates, against the formation of conscience, the production of *bad conscience* as “the consciousness of guilt” (Nietzsche *GM* 194) and duty.

But why does bad conscience manifest specifically as the affective perception of guilt? And of what use is guilt for the maintenance of the State form of social relations? According to Nietzsche, both “guilt” and “duty” originate from the same source as responsibility—the creditor-debtor relation. He writes, “It is in the sphere of contracts and legal obligations that the moral universe of guilt, conscience, and duty...took its inception” (*GM* 197) and that “the feeling of guilt and personal obligation had its inception in the oldest and most primitive relationship between human beings, that of buyer and seller, creditor and debtor” (*GM* 202), as evinced by “the fact that the basic moral term *Schuld* (guilt) has its origin in the very material term *Schulden* (to be indebted)” (*GM* 194).<sup>22</sup> This is the abstraction of material debts and payments into the moral sphere. The guilty individual is a debtor, one who has incurred a social “debt,” not by borrowing some material wealth, but by having committed a slight or transgressing a moral injunction against another individual, or even the social body. In turn, this abstraction of the creditor-debtor relationship into the realm of morality necessitates the instigation of an economy of punishment in which a system of equivalences is established

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<sup>22</sup> This etymological connection is not unique to German. As David Graeber notes, “if we look at the etymology of common words for ‘debt’ in European languages...[m]any are synonyms for ‘fault,’ ‘sin,’ or ‘guilt;’ just as a criminal owes a debt to society, a debtor is always a sort of criminal” (*Debt* 121).



between punishments and moral transgressions—having incurred a moral “debt” (guilt) the guilty individual may repay their debt by receiving the equivalent punishment.

Upon its entry into history through the violent imposition of the State, however, this system of guilt and punishment becomes bad conscience. Having been forced into the externally imposed laws, norms, and prohibitions of the State, the majority of human beings “[o]f a sudden...found all their instincts devalued, unhinged...It was not that those old instincts had abruptly ceased making their demands; but now their satisfaction was rare and difficult” (Nietzsche *GM* 217). Faced with a system of laws and punishments which “devalued” their natural instincts, to the point of making them blameworthy, the majority came to view themselves as fundamentally and perpetually guilty for their own inclinations toward freedom, and thus, in need of an equally perpetual form of punishment. Whereas under the schema of species activity guilt represented a repayable debt insofar as one could repay a singular moral transgression with a singular punishment, in bad conscience, the individual becomes guilty for their very *being*, and thus must repay their debt across the entirety of their existence through a constant self-beratement. This self-beratement is constituted by both the painful affective perception of infinite guilt, and the reflexive interiorization of instinct as self-persecution and psychological torture (Nietzsche *GM* 225-226).

Furthermore, the interiorized self-beratements of guilt prevent the individual from achieving the objective of species activity: to become a sovereign individual capable of moving beyond subjugation. This stifling of sovereign individuality happens as the individual’s affective experiences of bad conscience (perpetual guilt and self-torture) become moralized over time, abstracted into the social sphere as a sense of *duty*, a moral

obligation to feel guilt at the experience of one's own impulses and to conform to the laws and norms imposed by the State form of social relations. For Nietzsche, then, the "modern moralization of the ideas of guilt and duty—their relegation to a purely subjective 'bad conscience'—represents a determined attempt to invert the normal order of development, or at least to stop it in its tracks" (*GM* 224-225). Bad conscience interrupts the individual's "normal order of development" through culture, producing as a consequence a moralization of duty that shores up the State form against the sovereign individual who would make it superfluous. By mobilizing the guilt of individuals, the State is able to preserve its domination as a set of power relations and form of polity.

Bad conscience therefore represents the individual seeking to continue its social existence within the State through submission to the power, norms, and discourses that have been imposed upon them—the price of their continued social existence is their continued guilt-feelings and subordination to the State as a regime of power that is dominant and indifferent. Given the connections drawn by Nietzsche between *guilt* and *debt*, and his assertion that the relation of debtor to creditor is the most fundamental relation of human sociality, it is appropriate to read the individual's bad conscience, their continued self-beratement and subordination, as an attempt to repay a debt (the debt of social existence) to their creditor (the State form of social relations). Insofar as the subject is always becoming, and always has the potential to become a "sovereign individual," they are perpetually guilty, and thus perpetually accumulating and paying off debt. Through bad conscience, the debt of existence within the norms and laws of the State becomes unrepayable, and thus, infinite.

It is my contention that the bad conscience of guilt still functions in the way Nietzsche describes, as a mechanism to ensure conformity to the State form of social relations, but that it does not serve a wholly *repressive* function (a purely negative self-beratement that only prohibits freedom of the will and instincts). Rather, guilt serves to channel our activities into behaviours and circuits of circulation that form the very basis of the State.

This change in the function of guilt is the result of a transformation in the nature of State power. As will be explained further in the following section of this chapter, the State no longer operates primarily through a repressive or disciplinary exercise of power aimed at stopping or punishing certain forms of activity, but rather through interventions that excite and encourage forms of normative activity that work to produce and bolster the State as a set of power relations. Instilling and mobilizing guilt therefore must not work to stop activity, which would mark the death of the State's metastable existence, but rather to direct it down certain avenues and into particular patterns, which rigidify into domination once they have become habitual. In this sense, I believe bad conscience must be read as a distinctly *biopolitical* mechanism.

But what does it mean to read guilt as a biopolitical mechanism? And why should we do so? In order to answer these questions and justify my claims as to guilt's biopolitical usefulness, I will now turn to a reading of Michel Foucault's work on the particular features of biopower and biopolitics.

## 2.2 Foucault, Biopower, and Guilt as a Biopolitical Project

In his 1977-1978 lecture series at the College de France, Foucault described biopower as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (*STP* 16). These mechanisms, rather than addressing populations as groups of “legal subjects over whom the ultimate domination was death,” attempt to account for and manage populations as living beings by exercising mastery “at the level of life itself” (Foucault *HoS* 142-3), as a means of securing the State and increasing its internal productive forces.

For Foucault, this marks a distinct shift from the previous organizing strategy of power, which was primarily expressed in authoritarian and repressive modes, and was localized in the corporeal body of the sovereign monarch. In the pre-modern period, the sovereign could exercise their will absolutely over those people living within their delimited territory, with the most outright expression of this exercise being power over the life and death of their subjects (Nadesan 16). This represents the essence of sovereign power in the pre-modern period—the sovereign’s right of life and death. But this was a strange and asymmetrical power, as the sovereign obviously could not grant life in the same way they might inflict death. The sovereign’s right of life and death was therefore only “actually the right to kill: it is at a moment when the sovereign can kill that he exercised his right over life” (Foucault *SMBD* 241). Power in the pre-modern period was therefore tied to the ability of the sovereign to either inflict death or to withhold from killing, and was thus the power to “to take life or let live” (Foucault *SMBD* 241). This power was essentially a juridical power, expressed and exercised via the law and legal

institutions that acted on behalf of the sovereign, as “[l]aw cannot help but be armed, and its arm, *par excellence*, is death” (Foucault *HoS* 144).<sup>23</sup>

Biopower, by contrast, arose and was developed across the modern period in conjunction with the rise of the nation-state as the predominant mode of political organization. According to Foucault, as the early modern State began to develop across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, new rationalities of government (or “governmentalities”) began to be formulated in order to delineate the proper responsibilities for sovereign authority within the context of the State. These new governmental rationalities sought to establish lines of continuity between the government of the family and the government of the nation, and attempted to address the problem of maximizing “population wealth,” which was seen as essential to legitimizing and securitizing the modern State as a form of social organization. The problem of increasing the State’s internal forces by maximizing “population wealth” in turn necessitated the development of new governmental technologies, aimed at measuring and promoting the health and productivity of the State’s population—primarily, the new technology of *statistics* (Nadesan 17-19).

Through a detailed statistical accounting of various phenomena, such as “birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, [and]

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<sup>23</sup> It should be remembered here that the mechanisms for expressing the sovereign mode of power are akin to the “formidable bulwarks” of species activity described by Nietzsche, which, when coopted by the State, are used to pervert the process of subjectivation away from producing the individual of conscience and towards the production of the guilty subject of bad conscience. Under the schema of sovereign power, these bulwarks—namely, responsibility before sovereign authority and the threat of physical punishment (the ultimate expression of which is death) for the transgression of the law—become the means by which the State preserves itself against the individual of conscience, who has no need of the State or its laws. Thus, the techniques and logic of sovereign power, as described by Foucault, seem to align with Nietzsche’s account of the production of the subject of bad conscience.

patterns of diet and habitation” (Foucault *HoS* 25), *populations* rather than transgressive individuals quickly became a site for governance and control (Foucault, “The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century” 171). The life, productivity, and circulation of the population came to represent the wealth and security of the State—“population as wealth, population as manpower or labor capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded” (Foucault *HoS* 25)—and therefore came to be viewed as an object to be preserved and increased through strategic interventions. These interventions primarily involved campaigns to promote sanitation and public health, alongside “efforts to dismantle systems allowing the poor and idle to remain outside the circuits of production” (Nadesan 19), as the State sought to increase both the vitality (health and longevity) and productivity (economic yield) of the population.

For Foucault, this shift in the object of control and governance away from individualized subjects towards populations as the problem site of politics and economics also marked a change in the dominant modes of power. Taking the increased longevity and productivity of the population as its goal, the power exercised over the population by the modern State could no longer remain the sovereign power to “take life or let live,” but had to become “the power to ‘make’ live and ‘let’ die” (Foucault *SMBD* 241). Whereas the old sovereign power was necessarily imbalanced in favor of *death* (Foucault *SMBD* 240) this new form of power is similarly imbalanced in favor of *life*—the life, vitality, and productivity of the population.

A shift in the objectives of governmental power away from “taking life” and towards “making live” also necessitated new methods for taking control of the population. Being imbalanced in favour of death, sovereign power was exercised

primarily through repressive and punitive means, but the new mode of power that emerges with the rise of the modern State, imbalanced as it is in favour of life and “making live,” cannot be exercised through the same repressive and punitive technologies of the law. Rather, this new form of power is increasingly exercised through what Foucault terms “the action of the norm” (*HoS* 144), which attempts to “act at a distance” upon the desires and social practices of citizens primarily through the promulgation of...knowledge, experts, and institutions that promised individual empowerment and self-actualization” (Nadesan 27), in order to regulate and produce the life of the population, instead of simply repressing and punishing individuals.

Foucault dubs this new modern mode of power *biopower*, and the governmental rationality that makes use of it *biopolitics*. In essence, biopower constitutes “that form of power which takes the population as its object and operates primarily through the norm,” while biopolitics indicates “the science and technologies pertaining to the management of populations” (Nadesan 21). The objective of this mode of power is “the need to securitize the state internally while...appearing to abstain from direct intervention in economic ‘market’ government” (Nadesan 22) by ensuring that individuals and populations remain in circulations that reproduce the State, maximizing its wealth, productivity, and force. This requires the State to enact an ongoing management of the population at the level of life itself.

In the biopolitical scheme, an ongoing management at the level of life is achieved through a detailed understanding of the population and the production of averages (such as average birth and mortality rates) that form a concept of “normality” for the population (Foucault *HoS* 25). These averages, in turn, result in “a finer analysis that will make it

possible to disengage different normalities in relation to each other... Thus one will have the normal, overall curve, and different curves considered to be normal” (Foucault *STP* 93). What is produced through such biopolitical analyses are “[n]ormalized differences. Statistical deviations... nothing forbids you from being a little bit punk, slightly cynical, or moderately S & M... all transgressions [are tolerated], provided they remain *soft*” (Tiqqun 141). But in order to ensure that these transgressions remain “soft,” rather than threatening to the “normal” circulations of life, the task of biopolitics becomes “to try to reduce the most unfavorable, deviant normalities in relation to the normal, general curve, to bring them in line with this normal, general curve” (Foucault *STP* 90), not through disciplinary prohibitions, but by “allowing [the circulations of life] to take place,... controlling them, sifting the good and the bad, ensuring that things are always in movement... but in such a way that the inherent dangers of this circulation are cancelled out” (Foucault *STP* 93).

In short, biopower can be seen as the strategic organization of the multiplicity of forces that make up life in order to promote one form of life (the subject of bad conscience) to the exclusion of another (the subject as “sovereign individual”). This is not a wholly repressive process, but rather, “a productive relation of ‘making life live’” (Anderson, “Affect and Biopower” 30). In order to increase the State’s internal productive forces, it must elicit or excite (rather than suppress) activity. It must “make life live,” but always in such a way as to be non-threatening to the security of the State itself or the elements that constitute its strength (the productivity of the population). It must therefore only elicit certain *types* of activity, by “making life live” in particular, non-threatening ways. Thus, “[m]aking life live’ must... involve making a distinction



within life between a valued life that is productive and a devalued life that threatens” (Anderson, “Affect and Biopower” 30). By making this distinction between “valued” and “devalued” forms of life, the State can subsequently promote productive modes of living through interventions aimed at eliciting normative types of activity from the population, to the exclusion of risky types of activity. One method for exciting such valued, normative types of activity is to instill individuals with an affective perception of guilt, which moves the guilty individual to engage in reparative activities that conform to dominant norms and standards.

On my understanding, the “valued” form of life in the biopolitical scheme can thus be read as the guilty subject of bad conscience, whose guilt prompts normative, non-transgressive forms of activity that pose no threat to the existence or strength of the State, whereas the “sovereign individual” represents the “devalued life that threatens.” In the biopolitical scheme, the formation of valued forms of life must be actively promoted over the possibility of devalued forms of life, thereby requiring interventions on the part of the State aimed at directing the modes of living present within the population. For Foucault, these interventions differ significantly from the legal and disciplinary interventions against disruptive individuals that marked previous modes of governmentality. By contrast, within the State dominated by biopolitics, discourses and norms, along with indirect market and economic mechanisms, become the primary vehicle for societal government, while disciplinary interventions on individual bodies become a secondary means for bringing disruptive or non-productive subjects back into the circuits of production. Foucault terms these indirect mechanisms of control “an environmental type of intervention” in which “action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than

on the players” (*BoB* 260). The State thus tasks itself with producing an environment in relation to which the population will remain regulated, productive, and under control.

Such biopolitical interventions take as their object-target “the entirety of ‘life’ through some form of normalisation that includes all of life...In short, it is in the process of establishing norms from the aleatory that force is brought to bear directly on all of life” (Anderson, “Affect and Biopower” 32). While “life” here can (and has been) read as strictly biological or “bare” life, it also seems pertinent to examine other aspects of life that may become the object-targets of biopolitical intervention, as “life, and in particular the life of the population, is enacted in multiple ways; and, consequently, a wider range of ways of producing life are advocated” (Anderson, “Population and Affective Perception” 208). One such aspect of life that has become the object-target of biopower is the affective life of the population and the individuals who constitute it.

As recent works in the vein of affect theory have claimed, biopower not only involves interventions on the “bare” or biopolitical life of the subject, but also targets the affective and emotional life of the population.<sup>24</sup> According to these accounts, the affective life of the individuals who make up the population becomes something to be structured, controlled and managed through the biopolitical deployment of norms (Clough, “Introduction” 19). On the biopolitical scheme, certain affects must be enabled and encouraged while others must be diminished in order to prompt forms of circulation that

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<sup>24</sup> See particularly Patricia Ticineto Clough’s introduction to *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), as well as her article “The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine, and Bodies” from *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). Also see Michael Hardt’s foreword to *The Affective Turn*, and Ben Anderson’s article “Affect and Biopower: Towards a Politics of Life”.

produce value and bolster the State rather than threaten it (Clough, “Introduction” 25). This is because specific emotions or affective states also produce specific *effects*, specific forms of subjective activity and behaviour that can be generally predicted (Probyn 74). For example, as was explained in the previous chapter, guilt as an affective condition results in an excitation of reparative activity that conforms to normative standards, whereas shame produces withdrawal and anger towards others, who are seen as the source of shame (Nelissen et al. 357-38). By guiding individuals to experience affects that prompt forms of activity that are productive and useful to the State, other affects that could produce activity that would threaten the State are limited (Anderson, “Modulating the Excess of Affect” 180-81). The goal of biopolitics thus becomes the management of the affective life of the population through its primary method of intervention, “establishing norms from the aleatory” (Anderson, “Affect and Biopower” 32).

These norms work to socialize individuals by encouraging them to understand and conceptualize themselves, their actions and dispositions, in relation to standards that delimit the acceptable range of modes of living (Butler *PLP* 17-18). Conceptualizing the self in relation to normative standards constitutes the process whereby the subjectivity of individuals is produced. This process is experienced by the individual largely as a pre-cognitive affective state, rather than a form of cognitive understanding. Thus, through the process of subject construction the norms deployed through biopolitics are translated into an affective feeling or emotion. By controlling the kinds of norms that are formed from the aleatory and circulated within the population, the biopolitical State can also control the kinds of emotion experienced by the population in the process of subject construction (Clough, “The Affective Turn” 222).

Thus, against a more limited reading of biopower, I find that the target of biopolitical intervention includes the *affective* life of individuals, as well as the existential aspects of life, such as modes of behaviour and subjectivity, and that the aim of biopolitics is to produce particular *modes* of living, particular *types* of subjectivity. As such, it is my contention that the modern shift towards biopolitical forms of power and control aimed at securitizing the State should specifically be read as an expansion of the State's cooptation of species activity, the aim of which being a more insidious and expansive production of guilty subjects.

As mentioned previously, the goal of biopolitical intervention is to *secure* the State by channeling its population into productive modes of living that bolster its "population wealth" rather than modes of living that will produce disruptions to the State's existence. To produce and maintain security, it becomes necessary to ensure that relations of power, patterns of conduct, and the circulation of subjects crystalize into relatively identifiable and predictable patterns—patterns that produce and reproduce current social arrangements, rather than disrupt them.<sup>25</sup> This process should be read as *domination*. As Saul Newman notes:

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<sup>25</sup> These modes of living and patterns of conduct, of course, can include "soft" forms of transgression that, by failing to directly threaten or confront current arrangements of power, can be recuperated into the dominant forms of social relations as a means of bolstering and legitimizing the State. As explained by Tiqqun, the totalization of modes of living within the biopolitical State is a unity of "normalized differences". They write: "the global uniformity of attenuated forms-of-life produced through the conjunction of Spectacle and Biopower...is more a moiré pattern than multicolored: made up of differences, but *only in relation to the norm*... We are no longer dealing with a voluntaristic a priori totalization, but with molecular calibrations of subjectivities and bodies" (141). As such, a certain range of "difference" or non-normative modes of living can be tolerated within the biopolitical State and may even be encouraged, as long as these forms-of-life remain relatively non-threatening to the State itself.

Domination must be distinguished from power in the following sense...relations of power become relations of domination when the free and unstable flow of power relations becomes blocked and congealed—when it forms unequal hierarchies and no longer allows reciprocal relationships. These relations of domination form the basis of institutions such as the State...The State, in other words, is merely an effect of power relations that have crystallized into relations of domination (119-120).

Biopolitical interventions are thus a means of domination, as their aim is to produce the State as crystalized relations of power. One means for achieving this end is for the biopolitical State to “simply *produce* the obedient social subject it needs” (Hardt and Negri 53) by forming a system of norms in relation to which the process of subjectivation can take place. This “obedient social subject” is the individual of bad conscience, whose affective perception of guilt ensures that they maintain themselves as docile and responsible beings, who will not disrupt the normal circulations of activity within the State. As these normal circulations remain uninterrupted and become habitual, they crystalize into relations of domination. And insofar as crystalized relations of power are constituted by the everyday conduct, actions, and circulations of the individuals who make up the population, these same individuals in some sense become *complicit* with their own domination. However, as Pierre Bourdieu notes: “If it is fitting to recall that the dominated always contribute to their own domination, it is necessary at once to be reminded that *the dispositions which incline them to this complicity are also the effect, embodied, of domination*” (qtd. in Waquant 24). In this sense, an individual’s affective perception of guilt (and the subsequent forms of activity it moves them to engage in) can

make them complicit with their own domination, though this guilt must be seen as already *an embodied effect of the domination of the biopolitical State*.

Because of the precise effects it has on the body, the bad conscience of guilt represent an especially useful affective and subjective condition in biopolitical terms. As discussed in the previous chapter, much contemporary research into the social psychology of guilt has indicated that guilt as an emotional state is pre-eminently *productive*—it prompts subjective *activity*, rather than *passivity*. Unlike shame or many of the other moral emotions, which tend to render the subject passive, withdrawn, and which promote self-destructive behaviours (such as suicide), the nagging discomfort of *guilt* prompts the subject to engage in productive activity that conforms to normative patterns of conduct, rather than social withdrawal or passivity (Tangney & Dearing 2-3, 18-20). But what is even more important is that guilt produces activity of a very particular *kind*—for guilt does not simply make the subject active, but leads them to engage in activities that will *repair or re-establish norms and the relations of power that are produced by said norms*. In biopolitical terms, guilt provokes the subject to be productive by engaging in behaviours and circulations that will bolster the State's metastable existence, and increase its internal forces. The subject of bad conscience, who feels infinitely guilty before (and thus indebted to) the State, thus appears to be the ideal biopolitical subject.

The State's task is therefore to produce the subject of bad conscience, not solely through the disciplinary and punitive legal measures of the sovereign, but through the deployment of a system of norms that will form an *environment of subjectivation* that works to produce certain forms of life and types of subjectivity. In the contemporary,

neoliberal era, this system of norms largely consists of discourses of personal responsibility and intersecting forms of indebtedness. Such discourses of personal responsibility promote the idea that the effects of structural injustices are, in fact, caused by the individuals who suffer such effects, and as such, are the individual's responsibility. Singular agents are to blame for the negative effects of State domination and the world economy, and should thus monitor their own actions, internalizing any wrong done, and dutifully accepting the consequences.

But how specifically does the deployment of these norms work to produce the guilty subject of bad conscience? In order to gather a clearer understanding of how subjectivities can be produced, and how the deployment of norms can work to instill an affective perception of guilt within individuals, it will be necessary to turn our attention to the theory of *subjectivation* as a process of subject production.

## 2.3 Butler, Subjectivation, and Submission

In order to explain how the biopolitical deployment of norms can work to produce subjects of bad conscience and how guilt can be instilled through biopolitical interventions, I will now turn to Judith Butler's work in *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Giving an Account of Oneself*. In these texts, Butler provides a detailed analysis of subjectivation as the process by which individuals become subjects. For Butler, subjectivity is not coextensive or co-originary with the individual as some kind of stable essence at the heart of the individual's existence ("I am who I am") or as a unique set of embodied physical and psychic characteristics. Rather, subjectivity is always constructed in relation to a power that actively subjects the individual, producing them as a continuous becoming-subject, without a stable essence (GAO 7-8). This process of

subject-construction is *subjectivation*, which Butler (following Nietzsche) conceives as the formation of a capacity for memory, or the ability for the individual to give an account of their own being by drawing causal connections between acts willed and the subsequent material effects of those acts (*GAO* 10-15).

The creation of this capacity for memory involves a self-reflexivity on the part of the individual, which constitutes the process of subjectivation. As Butler notes, “the subject is formed by a will that turns back upon itself” (*PLP* 6), that takes itself as an object to be known and to be worked upon. However, this self-reflexivity—the act of the “will that turns back upon itself”—is prompted by a prior relation to a power, an other, an outside authority that demands the individual be able to give an account of their own being. For Butler, the process of subjectivation first requires the formation of “a system of justice and punishment. This system is not there from the start, but becomes instituted over time and at great cost to the human instincts” (Butler *GAO* 10) as it is imposed forcefully upon the individual. In essence, an external authority requires, on threat of punishment, that the individual be able to account for themselves, drawing causal connections between their own actions and the effects of those actions, and thus causes said individual to reflect upon themselves as a subject to be known. This reflexivity produces the subject *qua* subject—it is the process of subjectivation that constitutes the subject as an object of inquiry and reflection, and thus also produces conscience as the knowledge or “instinct” of the causal connection between the subject’s will and its effects.

Faced with an authority that can be variously described as a “system of justice and punishment,” a complex of laws and norms which precede the subject, a dominant



discourse (Butler *PLP* 5-6), or a regime of truth and power (Butler *GAO* 22), that demands the individual be able to give an account of themselves, the individual is subjected, in the sense of both “becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” and thus “the subject is initiated through a primary submission to power” (Butler *PLP* 2). The subject, in its primary relation of submission, is indebted to an external force for its own social existence as a subject, and this sense of indebtedness manifests within the individual as the affective feeling of *guilt* (Butler *PLP* 22-28).

The individual subject stands in guilt (or potential guilt) as a debtor in relation to a “communal complex” which acts as creditor, providing the conditions for the initial and continued social existence of the subject (Nietzsche *GM* 202). On Butler’s schema, this “communal complex” includes not only the legal or disciplinary structures of a society, but also the dominant norms and discourses that circulate within a social environment. These norms provide a framework within which the individual is expected to account for themselves, thereby working to *construct* the individual’s subjectivity and identity (Butler *GAO* 16-17). Rather than a simple or hegemonic process whereby external norms are simply absorbed by a pre-formed psyche, these norms work to construct the interiority of the subject, their very subjectivity, both by prompting the individual to reflect on themselves as an object of inquiry, and by providing the conditions within which an account of the self can be intelligibly rendered (*PLP* 17-18).<sup>26</sup> The dominant

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<sup>26</sup> This process is not entirely hegemonic because, as Butler notes, the subject is only ever tied to the condition of their originary subjection in an ambivalent way, as they are capable of exceeding and eclipsing the conditions of their own emergence as a subject (*PLP* 13-14). This is because the discourses and norms that construct the subject also *enable* them to act, potentially in a way that exceeds or acts *against* the conditions that produced them as a subject (*PLP* 15). While the subject is always conditioned by the norms that prepared the way for their emergence as a subject (*GAO* 9), *how* the subject will take up these norms

norms and discourses that prompt the process of subjectivation thus work to structure how the subject relates to and understands their own subjectivity, who they are, and what position they occupy within the social order. As such, the individual *owes* their subjectivity to the “communal complex” that provides the framework of norms that produced them, placing the subject in a position of indebtedness to their social creditor. This indebtedness, in turn, is experienced by the subject as an affective perception of *guilt*, which prompts them to act in accordance with the norms that subjected them, pre-emptively avoiding transgression, as a means of repaying their debt and continuing their existence as a subject (Butler *PLP* 26-28).

An initial guilt therefore resides at the heart of subjectivity, which Butler terms the “primary submission to power” (*PLP* 2). The subject’s inaugural guilt is not, however, wholly negative. For Butler, subjectivity is always tied to its originary subjection in an ambivalent way—the subject is capable of eclipsing the conditions of its own emergence (*PLP* 13-14). Because the particular way in which norms will be taken up by an individual is largely unpredictable, the process of subjectivation always implies the possibility for individual *agency*. In turn, the subject’s agency can efface its originary subordination to power by *exceeding* and *acting against it*, creating new sets of values

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remains an open question, as norms and discourses do not act deterministically on the individual (even if the subject is not fully free to disregard the norms that inaugurated them) (*GAO* 18-19). By examining themselves in relation to the norms that constructed their subjectivity, the subject is able to find ways or moments in which they do not fully fit the norms that conditioned their emergence (*GAO* 8). It is at these moments that the subject is able to critique the norms that produced them. By maintaining a critical relation to existing norms, exposing their limits while still being conditioned by them, the subject is able to enact a self-stylization in relation to these norms that doesn’t simply conform to their standards and prohibitions (*GAO* 17). In this way, the injunction of norms that initially prompt the process of subjectivation can compel a creative act of self-making that can produce a subject who is critical of dominant structures (*GAO* 18-19).

and standards of behaviour (Butler *GAO* 17-19). The initial moment of submission and guilt at the heart of subjectivity is thus capable of producing a subject capable of moving *beyond* this “primary submission to power” and subjugation to social norms. This is the subject of conscience—the “sovereign individual”.

However, the potential to move beyond submission to an external power remains latent insofar as the individual succumbs to the “bad conscience” of guilt, which places them into a position of infinite subjection in relation to the “higher” powers responsible for their initial and continued existence as a subject (*PLP* 74-75). Thus, we find again under the schema of subjectivation that the subject of conscience and the subject of bad conscience both spring from the same moment: the “primary submission to power” in relation to an external authority that marks the germinal moment of subjectivity. But, if under the schema of subjectivation, both conscience and bad conscience can arise out of the same initial moment of guilt, why and how are guilty subjects of bad conscience produced to the exclusion of “sovereign individuals”?

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler encourages us to understand the guilt of bad conscience in terms of *desire* (19-20). She explains that, because the subject desires to exist as a subject, and this desire is initially fulfilled by a regime of power that subordinates them, the subject becomes passionately attached to their initial subordination as a feeling of love. However, to complete the “normal order of development” into a sovereign individual, this subordination must be overcome—a desire for which the subject feels guilty. As Butler explains:

In order to preserve the object [of power to which one is subordinated through subjectivation] from one’s own aggression, an aggression that

always accompanies love (as conflict), guilt enters the psychic scene as a necessity. If the object goes, so goes a source of love. In one sense, guilt works to thwart the aggressive expression of love that might do in the loved object, an object understood to be a source of love; in a counter sense, however, guilt works to preserve the object as an object of love (its idealization) and hence (via idealization) to preserve the possibility of loving and being loved. Aggression—or hate—is not merely mitigated, but rerouted against the one who loves, operating as the self-beratements of the super-ego (*PLP* 26).

The “communal complex”, which constructs the individual’s subjectivity through its norms and discourses, becomes just such an object of love preserved by feelings of guilt, which reroute the subject’s aggression back against themselves as self-beratement. As explained previously, this guilty subject is the subject of bad conscience, who preserves the State as a “communal complex” by interiorizing their instincts for freedom and experiencing feelings of guilt over their desire for transgression. On Butler’s account, guilt thereby represents the subject seeking to continue its existence through submission to the power, norms, and discourses that inaugurated them as a subject. The price of their continued existence as a subject is their continued subordination to an external regime of power that is dominant and indifferent. The effect of this continued subordination, in turn, is the preservation of the relations of power that inaugurate the subject, and the subsequent crystallization of these power relations into *domination*. The guilt experienced in the process of subjectivation thus works to attach the subject to their own subordination and the relations of domination that produce them as a subject.

As Butler notes, this guilt can become an insidious mode of social regulation, as “[t]he psychic operation of the norm offers a more insidious route for regulatory power than explicit coercion, one whose success allows its tacit operation within the social” (*PLP* 21). Because the process of subjectivation is unpredictable and always contains the possibility that the subject, through their own agency, might go beyond the “communal complex” that originally subjected them, it becomes necessary for the “communal complex” to enact measures that will preserve its existence against such a possibility. Norms are thus produced which seek to govern the formation of the subject and circumscribe the domain of livable sociality, creating an *environment of subjectivation* that guides the individual to remain in guilt, as opposed to moving on into sovereign individuality (*PLP* 21, 28). By making the norms and discourses that prompt the process of subjectivation the very conditions for social existence, the individual must continue to conform to the demands of those same norms in order to exist as a recognized subject (*PLP* 28). These norms, in turn, demand that the subject behave and circulate in such a way as to reproduce the “communal complex” as a crystalized set of power relations, provoking the guilt at the heart of subjectivity to ensure the subject’s conformity. The production and circulation of such norms as an environment of subjectivation constitutes a biopolitical strategy of control.

In the context of the modern State, the process of subjectivation becomes a biopolitical project aimed at increasing the vital and productive forces of the population by “simply [*producing*] the obedient social subject it needs” (Hardt and Negri 53). The continued subordination to the norms of the biopolitical State marks the continuation, persistence, and security of the State form of social relations against those elements that

would seek to go beyond it as sovereign individuals. Through the biopolitical deployment of norms, it is ensured that the price of the subject's social existence is their continued subordination, their self-subordination, their bad conscience, their infinite and unrepayable indebtedness. In this way, "deviant normalities" are brought into line with the average curve of the "normal" through the very process of subjectivation. In essence, in order to pay the debt of subjectivity and relieve their guilt, the subject is encouraged to engage in "normal" patterns of behaviour and circulation, forms of life, which serve to reproduce existing relations of power. But this debt can never be fully repaid, and must be paid and paid again, as the continual self-beratement of bad conscience. The affective perception of guilt thus becomes a biopolitical mechanism, and control is established in the initial and ongoing moments of subjectivation.

On this account, the central question of politics becomes how our desire to exist as social subjects is exploited by various forces in order to produce our own subordination and attach us to domination as the crystallization of power relations (*PLP* 130). It is my contention that, in the contemporary period, this desire is exploited by the State as a biopolitical project primarily through the formation of an environment of subjectivation that consists mainly of neoliberal discourses of *personal responsibility* and *the circulation of financial debt*. In the next chapter, I will take up a detailed examination of these features of the contemporary environment of subjectivation in order to show how they produce an affective perception of guilt, and how this guilt works to reinforce the State as a form of polity. However, it will first be necessary to examine how guilt functions as a biopolitical mechanism that maintains control of subjects by producing their *voluntary servitude*. Therefore, in the remaining portion of this chapter, I will

attempt to synthesize the theory presented here in order to explain guilt's function as a biopolitical mechanism of control.

## 2.4 Guilt and Bad Conscience as Biopolitical Mechanism of Control

As I have argued, Nietzsche views culture as a project that should terminate in the production of the sovereign individual, who creates their own values and becomes irresponsible in relation to outside systems of authority, such as the State form of social relations. This process, however, has been coopted and perverted by the State, which does not use it to produce sovereign individuals who would move beyond it, but rather to produce the responsible subject of bad conscience who, through the affective perception of guilt lodged at the heart of their subjectivity, remains subjected and subjugated to the State. For Nietzsche, this production of the bad conscience of guilt was achieved through the mobilization of the “formidable bulwarks” of species activity—punishment and responsibility—which are enacted through forms of discipline and coercion that are applied directly to the individual, and juridical institutions capable of threatening and executing the sovereign right to kill. As has been explored in this chapter, however, the sovereign right to kill is no longer the dominant mode of power exercised by the State—according to Foucault's account, sovereign power has largely been displaced by biopower and biopolitics.

But does this mean that the State no longer produces the guilty subject of bad conscience through a cooptation of species activity, or that guilt is no longer mobilized to ensure that subjects remain subjugated to the State as a form of polity? I do not believe this is the case. Rather, it is my contention that biopolitics represents a further

colonization of species activity by the State, an expansion of the State's claim over the tools of species activity as an overall project, and an extension of species activity from the specificity of control over individual bodies (which is the domain of sovereign/disciplinary techniques) into the wider, more general field of control over the population (the domain of biopolitical techniques). Through biopolitics, the training and selection of species activity is no longer taken up merely at the level of the individual disciplinary training of bodies, but primarily at the level of life itself through normalizing and regularizing procedures that create an environment of subjectivation, allowing the State to manage the process of subjectivation at a distance, thereby obscuring its role in the subjugation of its subjects and effectively erasing any perception of the processes of domination that secure the State against those who would move beyond it.

In the contemporary era, the biopolitical State acts as the source of a framework of norms that prompt the process of subjectivation. These norms, in turn, are designed to provoke *guilt* in the subject—a guilt which works to attach the subject to the conditions of subordination that have initiated their subjectivity—namely, the State form of social relations. In order to move past these initial conditions of subordination and become “sovereign individuals,” subjects would need to transgress the norms that produced their subjectivity and that circumscribe “the domain of a livable sociality” (Butler *PLP* 21) in which they may continue to exist and be recognized precisely as a social subject. The feeling of guilt this potential transgression provokes prevents the individual from moving beyond subordination to these norms, and subsequently *attaches* them to the initial conditions that constituted them as a subject. The guilty subject will remain in a relation of subordination to the power that subjected them.



Additionally, the affective perception of guilt prompted by the norms of the biopolitical State not only leads the subject to remain subordinated to the State, but further prompts them to become *active*—to engage in activities and circulations that conform to the norms to which they have become attached. As explained in the previous chapter, guilt moves subjects to engage in “constructive” or reparative actions that seek to re-establish or reinforce the norms that have prompted their guilt, but only within the conditions permitted by these norms (Tangney and Dearing 95-104). The normative standards of the biopolitical State require the individual to be economically productive, non-risky, and to generally engage in circulations that bolster and reproduce the State and its “population wealth,” rather than threaten or move beyond it. Guilt thus works to attach individual subjects to modes of behaviour that strengthen and reproduce the State.

It is my contention that, when mobilized by the biopolitical State, guilt thus constitutes a source of *voluntary servitude*. Though the affective perception of guilt is prompted by sources external to the individual subject (i.e., the norms of the biopolitical State) it resides within the individual’s subjectivity itself. The subject’s own sense of guilt guides them to engage in behaviours that bolster the State’s power and domination *willingly*, without direct forms of coercion, such as the sovereign right to kill. The activity and circulation that produce the State as a form of domination thus come to emanate from the subject’s own affective life. Their participation in this domination is *voluntary*, insofar as it does not require direct coercion or disciplinary intervention. The guilty subject of bad conscience, who experiences their very subjectivity as an affective feeling of guilt, thus constitutes the ideal subject for the biopolitical State, which draws

its strength and legitimacy from a population that is willing to manage itself and remain productive without direct disciplinary intervention.

Moreover, because guilt can be provoked and instilled within subjects from a distance (i.e., through the deployment of norms and indirect interventions) rather than through coercive mechanisms, while also producing the subject's voluntary servitude, it functions as a model biopolitical mechanism of control. By producing an environment of subjectivation that guides individuals to remain in guilt—that makes them feel *infinitely guilty*—the biopolitical State is simultaneously able to preserve itself as a form of polity (by ensuring that individuals will engage in their own subordination voluntarily) and increase its internal force and “population wealth” (by ensuring that the individual subjects who constitute the population engage in productive activity).

On my reading of Nietzsche, Butler, and Foucault, biopolitics therefore represents a more insidious use of species activity by the State for the goal of its own preservation than previous modes of governmentality, in which State power was enacted through punitive disciplinary coercion enacted directly onto individual subjects, as in the sovereign right to take life. In the contemporary context, the potential production of sovereign individuals who may not act in predictable patterns, and who will likely eschew the domination of the State form of social relations, represents a disruptive risk to both the State's security and the continued growth of its “population wealth,” while the guilty subject of bad conscience represents the productive subject needed by the biopolitical State, their affective perception of guilt acting as the biopolitical mechanism of control aimed at maintaining their productivity.

But how, specifically, does the biopolitical State ensure the voluntary servitude of the population through the production of guilty subjects against the potential risk of “sovereign individuals”? While I have mentioned the biopolitical State’s creation of an environment of norms in relation to which a guided process of subjectivation takes place, I have yet to explain what features in particular constitute this environment of subjectivation. Throughout the next chapter, I will argue that in the contemporary era, in which States predominantly govern on the principles of neoliberalism, this environment largely consists of *discourses of personal responsibility* and the extension of the creditor-debtor relation throughout the social field through the *proliferation of financial debt*. It is my contention that these features work to produce the guilty subject of bad conscience, and I will thus seek to offer a detailed explanation as to *how* discourses of personal responsibility and the proliferation of financial debt function to produce guilt, and *why* these particular mechanisms are mobilized by the contemporary State, by contextualizing them in relation to the rise of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Neoliberalism and the Production of Guilty Subjects

In the previous chapter, the affective perception of guilt was examined as a biopolitical mechanism of control, instilled within the individual through the process of subjectivation and mobilized as a means of preserving the State as a set of crystalized relations of power. It was proposed that, in the biopolitical scheme, the State primarily intervenes on the life of the population by producing a general environment in which the process of subjectivation takes place, guiding individuals to become the docile and productive subjects of bad conscience rather than disruptive sovereign individuals by instilling an affective perception of guilt at the centre of their subjectivity. But what are the particular features that make up this environment of subjectivation? And how is the affective perception of guilt instilled in the contemporary context of neoliberal states?

Within the contemporary situation, the process of subjectivation takes place in relation to a social field that largely consists of various interpenetrating forms of infinite debt. Examples abound. “[T]he *automatic* institution of the credit relation, which thereby establishes *permanent* debt” is carried with us, residing in our wallets, in the chips and strips of credit cards (Lazzarato *MOIM* 20). Student debt in the United States exceeds one trillion dollars, accounting for more of the population’s debt than all other forms of consumer credit combined, while most graduates remain underemployed after graduation, diminishing the likelihood that they will ever finish paying back their loans (Soederberg

104-108).<sup>27</sup> The Welfare State has been sold off, piecemeal, to financial markets and international ratings agencies, borrowing money to maintain itself while shifting its debts onto the citizenry through taxation (Lazzarato *MOIM* 15-16).

Simultaneously, as levels and forms of financial debt expand, individual debtors are increasingly held *responsible* not only for their own debts and financial decisions, but for the decisions of their creditors and *the fate of the economy as a whole*. As the most recent financial crisis has shown, States, media pundits, economic experts, and politicians are all more than willing to support banks and financiers who make poor economic decisions through forms of “corporate welfarism” (Soederberg 56-57), while holding individual debtors (and the entire population) responsible for both their own debts and the economic crisis as a whole (Lazzarato *GBD* 40-42).

But what affective condition is produced by these infinite debts and discourses of personal responsibility? Through this chapter, I will argue that the environment of debt and responsibility fostered by the neoliberal State works to produce the subject of bad conscience—a “subjective figure that...now occupies the entirety of public space” and is “at once responsible and guilty for [their] particular fate” (Lazzarato *MOIM* 8-9)—who experiences their subjectivity as an affective feeling of *guilt*. This affective experience of guilt, in turn, works to align the subject with current arrangements of power by prompting

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<sup>27</sup> Additionally, there can be no escape from these debts through bankruptcy or other mechanisms designed to protect the debtor from paying infinitely. As Soederberg notes, “To deal with the social risks involved in rising default rates on student loans...Congress enacted disciplinary policies to restrict access to bankruptcy relief for student debtors. For instance, student loans were dischargeable until Congress enacted the Higher Education Act of 1976...which in effect made student loans non-dischargeable” (113), while for loans issued directly by the State, “the debtfare state enjoys *super-creditor* status, meaning that it has limitless powers (to garnish wages, tax refunds and even Social Security payments) and unlimited time (no statute of limitation) to collect student loan debt” (115).

them to engage in behaviours and activities that reproduce the neoliberal State and economy. It is therefore my position that the formation of this type of subjectivity should be read as a biopolitical project, insofar as the subject's indebtedness is mobilized in order to produce and maintain currently existing and expanding neoliberal relations of power.

In order to examine how guilt is instilled and mobilized in the contemporary era, the remainder of this chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will define the basic features of neoliberalism as the dominant mode of governmentality for contemporary States. The following sections will then address the circulation of discourses of personal responsibility and the extension of the creditor-debtor relation to the entire population as the primary means by which guilt is instilled in individuals within the neoliberal State. In order to demonstrate how guilt is instilled at the micro-level of the individual via macro-level social structures I will additionally turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose theories of habitus and social fields capture the sociological compliment to the theoretical process I described above. The instillation of guilt within individuals, in turn, will be read as a biopolitical project aimed at producing subjects of bad conscience, who will remain economically productive and under control, rather than disruptive to dominant arrangements of power.

### 3.1 Features of the Neoliberal State

In order to properly understand how and why the contemporary State works to instill an affective perception of guilt within the population as a means of control, it is first necessary to understand its dominant logic of governance. This section will therefore

be dedicated to examining the basic features of neoliberalism, which represents the governmentality of the contemporary State.

Neoliberalism is a term used to describe the logic of State governance that has become dominant since the 1970s. As Foucault describes in his lecture series of 1978, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, neoliberalism emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century as a particular rationale of good governance, or what he terms a “governmentality,” based in critiques of the Welfare State model that was dominant at the time. According to Foucault, neoliberalism formed as a type of governmentality in response to the idea that the Welfare State, in its attempts to ameliorate the more destructive effects of an unregulated economic market through centralized technologies of power that intervened directly into the economic life of the population, governs too much to adequately produce self-governing subjects (*BoB* 146). By contrast, neoliberalism proposes that individuals should be let alone by the State and made responsible for their own governance, essentially left to regulate their own behaviour in relation to the economic market, while the State should be charged with producing and maintaining the space of the market through indirect interventions on the population (*BoB* 147).<sup>28</sup> The task of the State

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<sup>28</sup> As Foucault explains:

neo-liberal governmental intervention is no less dense, frequent, active, and continuous than in any other system. But what is important is to see what the point of application of these governmental interventions is now. Since this is a liberal regime, it is understood that government must not intervene on effects of the market. Nor must neo-liberalism, or neo-liberal government, correct the destructive effects of the market on society, and it is this that differentiates it from, let's say, welfare or suchlike policies that we have seen [from the twenties to the sixties]. Government must not form a counterpoint or a screen, as it were, between society and economic processes. It has to intervene on society as such, in its fabric and depth. Basically, it has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market (*BoB* 146-47).

becomes to produce the market as a free self-regulating space in which subjects may competitively pursue their own economic interests. In turn, it is believed that in a free market, individuals will rationally make choices that are in their best economic interest, and will come to regulate themselves in relation to fluctuations in the economy without the need for direct disciplinary interventions, thereby producing a maximum of individual freedom while maintaining a stable economy and high levels of wealth for all. As such, the State and the market become co-implicated, as markets cannot develop spontaneously but require the State to foster them,<sup>29</sup> while the market becomes a space in which the population remains regulated without direct input from the State (Graeber *Debt* 50).

But in order to produce the market as a free self-regulating space which does not require direct intervention in order to properly function, the State must shift the point of application for its interventions. Rather than acting on the economy *directly* through forms of legislation that seek to regulate economic activity or programs of social assistance that would ameliorate the effects of the market, the State must intervene on the population in such a way as to *excite the productive economic activity of subjects* (Lazzarato *GBD* 104-106). Activity that will *produce* and *maintain* the function of the market must be excited, rather than activity or behaviour that could be potentially disruptive, as the proper functioning of the economy marks the measure of the State's

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<sup>29</sup> As Lazzarato explains, this is because

[for neoliberals] the market constitutes a 'machine' that automatically finds the path to equilibrium. Yet unlike the market of classical liberalism, the [neoliberal] market...is governed by competition rather than exchange. Instead of a mere natural game of appetites, instincts, and behaviours, competition must be *produced, incited, supported, and protected*. The governmentality of new state capitalism must intervene, as thoroughly as the Keynesian state, in order to arrange the *social conditions* of its existence. Competition and the market constitute a formal game that, like all formal structures, functions only under certain conditions which must be 'carefully and artificially developed' (*GBD* 105-106).



power and its “population wealth”. The neoliberal State thus comes to favor indirect, biopolitical interventions that aim to produce social subjects who will actively engage in approved forms of economic activity, rather than engaging in activity that would fall outside the circuits of the market (Lazzarato *GBD* 135-136). As such, under neoliberalism, biopower and biopolitics (as defined in the previous chapter) still represent the dominant modes of social intervention pursued by the State. Biopower and environmental interventions remain the primary technique for the regulation, control, and production of subjectivity for the purposes of maintaining the State form of social relations (Lazzarato *GBD* 135).

However, in the neoliberal State, these environmental interventions increasingly take the form of economic mechanisms aimed at producing the market by exciting the productive activity of subjects, while simultaneously ameliorating any risks posed to the smooth functioning of the market by the population. Under neoliberal logics, not only must the State produce the space of the market while refraining from direct interventions into the economy via regulatory measures, but the State itself must come to operate on the *principles* of the market, while the economy must become the basis and primary mechanism for exercising State power. This involves, for example, the privatization and commodification of public goods such as low-income housing and social security pensions (Soederberg 50), and the reconstitution of social welfare on the economic model of credit and exchange, whereby services are no longer provided as a right of the citizen but loaned with the expectation of repayment (Lazzarato *MOIM* 103-104, 130-137). Additionally, under neoliberalism, State legislation comes to favor the promotion of economic competition over the welfare of the population, by way of the deregulation of

the financial industry, corporate bailout packages, and the implementation of policies of economic austerity (Soederberg 44-50, 56-61).<sup>30</sup> By operating on the principles of the market while simultaneously using it to exercise power, the neoliberal State thus becomes indistinguishable from the economy (Lazzarato *GBD* 100).

As such, neoliberal reforms have effectively dispersed and deterritorialized the operations and technologies of power and governance, favoring biopolitical interventions that act on individuals indirectly or at a distance, rather than through direct disciplinary techniques, while still attempting simultaneously to produce self-governing subjects by encouraging individuals to conceptualize themselves as personally responsible for their own management. As Thomas Lemke explains:

The neoliberal forms of government feature not only direct intervention by means of empowered and specialized state apparatuses, but also characteristically develop indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals without at the same time being responsible for them. The strategy of rendering individual subjects ‘responsible’ (and also collectives, such as families, associations, etc.) entails shifting the responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, etc., and for life in society into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of ‘self-care.’ The key

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<sup>30</sup> The obvious example here is the bailout packages provided by the U.S. government to banks and financial institutions after the 2008 debt crash. Rather than attempting to ameliorate the conditions of poverty that were exacerbated by the crisis through some form of debt-relief aimed at the population or the imposition of regulatory legislation on the financial sector, the U.S. government mobilized billions of dollars to bolster failing corporations in order to keep the economy operating smoothly.

feature of the neo-liberal rationality is the congruence it endeavors to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual (201).

Subsequently, with the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant mode of governmentality, indirect market and economic mechanisms, along with discourses and norms encouraging personal responsibility, have become the primary mechanisms of government, while disciplinary interventions on individual bodies are used as a secondary means for bringing disruptive or non-productive subjects back into the circuits of production.<sup>31</sup> These indirect mechanisms of control still constitute “an environmental type of intervention” in which “action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players” (*BoB* 260). Conceiving of individuals primarily as economic subjects who take personal responsibility for their own management in relation to variables in their market environment, the neoliberal State tasks itself with producing an environment in relation to which subjects will remain regulated, productive, and under control. In this sense, “the person who accepts reality or who responds systematically to modifications in

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<sup>31</sup> While the neoliberal State operates primarily through biopolitical mechanisms that attempt to govern at a distance while avoiding direct intervention on individual subjects, disciplinary forms of power are still used to recuperate unruly or non-normative subjects who do not initially respond to biopower. As Nadesan explains:

Individuals who fail to take ‘responsibility’ for their self-government, or whose modes of comportment violate normative or modality-specific standards, are subject to various forms of guidance and discipline exercised by various ‘expert’ authorities (see Dean, 2002a). Should rehabilitative efforts fail, punitive disciplinary reforms may be availed. Remnants of an older expression of sovereign power, now embodied in state authorities and dispersed by biopolitical actors, may be exercised to incarcerate or otherwise operate upon maladaptive individuals in the name of public order, security, and life itself. The complex operations of heterogeneous forms of power—biopower, pastoral power, and disciplinary power—are all employed to guide and discipline unruly individuals (34).

As such, the use of disciplinary measures often *increases* under neoliberalism.

the variables of the environment, appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment...someone who is eminently governable” (*BoB* 271).

As a result of this shift, the disciplinary normalization of individuals has largely been replaced by an endless management and neutralization of the *risk* posed by populations to economic circulations and the security of the State through a pre-emptive exercise of power that prevents disruptions before they happen rather than punishing responsible individuals afterwards. As Nadesan explains, “the dissemination of neoliberal systems of government most typically involve dispersal of neoliberal market disciplines and technologies of the self, particularly linked to consumption and work-related identities. Power thus centers on life and operates most ubiquitously through the authority of the norm and calculations of risks” (188). But because risk is essentially a category that exists in potential, as the possible threat of a disruption rather than the disruption itself, its management requires pre-emptive actions that foreclose the possibility of disruption before it happens, thereby nullifying the risk.

The environmental interventions mentioned previously act as one such pre-emptive exercise of power, as “[t]hreat’s ultimately ambient nature makes pre-emptive power an environmental power. Rather than empirically manipulate an object (of which actually it has none), it modulates felt qualities infusing a life-environment” (Massumi 62). Because risk exists in potential throughout the population, rather than residing within individual figures or groups, risk management has no definite object, and thus must manipulate conditions in the environment that may combine to produce subjects whose behaviour becomes disruptive to the continued functioning of the State and market. As

such, the “environmental type of intervention” constitutes a form of power that aims to create “a life-environment” in relation to which the population will respond in ways that are favourable and non-disruptive to the State, thereby maintaining control by pre-emptively foreclosing the potential for disruption. Such an environment serves to control the process of subjectivation, which in turn channels the behaviour of individuals into relatively predictable patterns of circulation that reproduce the State form of social relations, while “dangerous classes are neutralized through risk-management technologies, including ‘surveillance, urban seclusion and mass confinement’ ...[as well as] the additional risk-based technology of high-interest financing, which promises consumer goods to low-income populations but delivers a new kind of debtor servitude ” (Nadesan 87). By encouraging an environment of subjectivation made up of norms and discourses that direct the process of subjectivation towards producing subjects who will engage in productive rather than non-productive or risky forms of behaviour, the neoliberal State is able to pre-emptively ameliorate the risk that exists in potential throughout the population.

It is my contention that the dominant features which constitute the neoliberal environment of subjectivation are the circulation of discourses of personal responsibility and the extension of the creditor-debtor relation throughout the population. These features, and how they work to produce the subject of bad conscience, will be examined in detail in the following sections of this chapter, beginning with discourses of personal responsibility.

## 3.2 Personal Responsibility

Within the neoliberal State, discourses of personal responsibility proliferate. Since at least the early 1980s, as neoliberalism has been increasingly adopted as the dominant mode of governmentality for most States, a seismic shift has taken place in the understanding of who should be held responsible for the general well-being of the population (Marion Young 3). Previously, under the Welfare State model, responsibility for the health, longevity, and economic security of the population was viewed as the purview of the State, which was to take on a paternalistic role in ensuring social and economic stability for each and all of its citizens (Nadesan 26-28). However, as the dominant form of governmentality has moved towards neoliberalism, responsibility—especially for economic stability—has increasingly been shifted onto the individual subjects who constitute the population. Under neoliberalism, it is understood that the State “should cut short [its] entitlement mentality, and make specific demands on needy people to take personal responsibility for their lives” (Marion Young 3). As such, “the neoliberal [S]tate divulges paternalistic responsibility for its subjects but simultaneously holds its subjects responsible for self-government... Within this neoliberal framework, the social and economic burden of risk shifts from employers and the state to individuals, who must assume the responsibility for rational risk management” (Nadesan 33). Furthermore, within the neoliberal State, each person is not only to be held responsible for their actions by outside parties, but must also “*internalize* the consequences of [their] actions...and self-sufficiently bear the costs of [their] choices...[with] no moral right to expect help from others, even if the individual...should suffer harm or disadvantage” (Marion Young 10).

This shifting of responsibility from the State or social institutions to individuals has been achieved in the first instance through the circulation of discourses of personal responsibility. Personal responsibility is the idea that each individual is fully responsible for their own well-being and social position, and should pursue private economic solutions to correct any problems or limitations they may suffer. As Nadesan notes, “Responsibilized individuals are mobilized to govern themselves through convenient and promising commercial products and technologies. Yet...the personal identities and lifestyles within which these products and technologies are embedded...are not neutral, not devoid of political inflection” (212). Indeed, precisely by being commercial products and technologies, these individualized solutions take on the political inflection of neoliberalism.

As neoliberal governmentality encourages us to conceptualize individuals primarily as *economic agents*, the discourses of personal responsibility that proliferate tend to focus on the responsibility that each individual has for their own economic status. In reality, these discourses disproportionately focus on the responsibility that the impoverished have for their own condition, promoting the idea “that the causes of being poor are largely traceable to attributes and behavior of the poor people themselves. On this account, the social segments that tend to be poor do not take as much responsibility for their lives as members of other groups do, and too often they engage in deviant or self-destructive behavior” (Marion Young 3). Subsequently, it is proposed that the poor should take on more responsibility for their lives—first by monitoring their own attributes and behaviours to ensure that they align with normative standards of “good” economic practices, and second, by seeking out individualized solutions to alleviate their

poverty.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, for those requiring assistance to acquire the basic necessities of life, being responsible entails willingly submitting to punitive and disciplinary adjustments to their behaviour in order to access social assistance programs (Soederberg 59-60).

This emphasis on the responsibility of the poor for their own condition of poverty arises from the fact that, in the neoliberal State, the measure for being a responsible citizen is tied directly to one's ability to provide for oneself economically without social assistance. An individual's economic position acts as evidence of their ability to make "good" financial decisions, to behave properly, and to be productive, for which they have been rewarded with financial success. Conversely, poverty acts as evidence of an individual's "poor" financial choices, irresponsibility, and laziness (Soederberg 51-53). This is because the discourses of personal responsibility that circulate under neoliberalism encourage individuals to conceptualize themselves on the model of an economic enterprise (Foucault *BoB* 242). Each individual is to evaluate themselves

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<sup>32</sup> These standards of personal responsibility are still applied to individuals whose income places them above the poverty line, as they are encouraged to conceptualize the benefits of their economic position as a result of "good" choices and behaviour (i.e., "I am *responsible* for my wealth and *deserve* what I have because I work hard and make good financial decisions, unlike those in poverty"). Additionally, each individual is always capable of *potentially* making poor financial decisions, and thus incurring negative effects. As Marion Young notes, in the United States

[m]ost people who live under the federally defined poverty line do not stay there all their lives. 'Spells' of poverty are most common...taking into consideration their entire lives, however, the *majority* of Americans experience at least one 'spell' of poverty, and many experience multiple spells separated by better times. We would be likely to find that a large proportion of people in some European countries also experience poverty at some point in their lives, if we bracket the more generous and reliable safety net available to a larger cross-section of individuals in those countries (24).

Thus, while discourses of personal responsibility tend to disproportionately focus on the responsibility of the poor, they still apply to and affect most of the population.



constantly on the basis of the market, assessing the economic risks and implications of every choice they make or behaviour they engage in, and is expected to pursue the types of activity that will be most economically beneficial (Lazzarato *GBD* 185-86).<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, the responsibility for any negative economic outcome is attributed solely to the individual and their decisions.

This assumes a model of responsibility based on *guilt*. Rather than being understood as the product of complex and intersecting social forces that cannot be attributed to any single individual, negative economic outcomes are to be attributed to singular agents who are encouraged to take on blame and responsibility, allowing others to be absolved of fault. On this model, individuals have no obligation to assist others, only to monitor their own actions and internalize any outcomes that befall them as their own fault (Marion Young 11). Furthermore, as the individual is always *potentially* capable of making poor decisions—and is even likely to, given the difficulty of fully foreseeing the effects of any action—they are always potentially guilty for future economic outcomes. This attribution of blame and responsibility marks the individual as responsible for their fate, and works to produce an affective perception of guilt within them (Lazzarato *MOIM* 9).

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<sup>33</sup> This additionally involves a constant project of self-improvement, whereby the individual attempts to improve their own economic viability through various investments in themselves as an “abilities-machine” (Foucault *BoB* 229). By making investments of time and money into their own education, skills training, health, and comportment, it is believed that the individual will become a more desirable candidate for employment, and will thus increase their ability to earn an income. As the individual is encouraged to evaluate every aspect of their being on the basis of economic productivity, their *entire life* becomes encompassed in this process of investment and self-improvement, and the individual in themselves come to constitute a form of capital. This new form of capital, which consists of the various aspects of an individual’s life, is what Foucault terms “human capital” (*BoB* 219-230).

This is because, as was explored in the previous chapter, responsibility constitutes a mnemotechnics used to prompt the process of subjectivation and produce the guilty subject of bad conscience (Nietzsche *GM* 190-202). By encouraging individuals to constantly evaluate themselves on the basis of the market, assessing the economic implications of their choices, behaviours, and lifestyle, the discourse of personal responsibility that circulates under neoliberalism prompts the individual to reflect on themselves in order that they may give a detailed account of their being in relation to an external norm. As will be remembered from the previous chapter, this self-evaluation for the purposes of giving a detailed account of one's being marks the self-reflexivity of a "will that turns back upon itself" (Butler *PLP* 6), which constitutes the process of subjectivation that produces the individual's subjectivity. The discourse of personal responsibility provides a framework within which the individual is expected to account for themselves, thereby working to *construct* the individual's subjectivity and interiority, both by prompting the individual to consider themselves as an object of inquiry, and by providing the conditions within which an account of the self can be rendered (*PLP* 17-18). In this case, the conditions under which an account of the self can be rendered are constituted by a model of responsibility based on guilt. In order to continue their existence as a social subject under these conditions, it is necessary for the individual to conceptualize themselves as responsible and guilty for their own position. Guilt is thus instilled at the heart of the individual's subjectivity.

But how, in particular, does this installation of guilt within the individual's subjectivity come to pass? By what process do macro-level social phenomena and structures (such as the circulation of discourses of personal responsibility) become

translated into micro-level phenomena (such as subjective and affective states and practices)? In order to explain this translation I will turn to the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, whose conceptions of habitus and social fields provide a robust explanation of the process whereby social phenomenon are distilled into subjective states and practices.<sup>34</sup>

For Bourdieu, social space is constituted by what he terms “fields”—objective spaces in which individuals may find themselves throughout the course of their everyday life, such as “[t]he school system, the state, the church, political parties, or unions” (“The Purpose of Reflexive Sociology: The Chicago Workshop” 102). These fields are largely constituted by various social structures and rules, which include not only physical objects, spaces, and institutions, but also systems of norms and discourses. In turn, fields can be conceptualized on the model of a game or “space of play” in which the field’s structure guides the conduct of players by enabling some forms of action while foreclosing others. However, unlike the traditional sense of a game, the structures which govern conduct within a social field are not explicitly stated as rules,<sup>35</sup> and can constitute an object of struggle between individuals who occupy different positions within the field. Because certain positions within a social field will provide more advantages and power than others,<sup>36</sup> “[t]hose who dominate in a given field are in a position to make it function

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<sup>34</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I will primarily be drawing on Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). For a more in-depth discussion of the totality of Bourdieu’s theory, see Loïc J.D. Waquant’s “Toward a Social Praxeology: The Structure and Logic of Bourdieu’s Sociology” in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Rather, on Bourdieu’s scheme, “the juridical or customary rule is never more than a *secondary principle* of the determination of practices, intervening when the primary principle...fails” (*Outline of a Theory of Practice* 76).

<sup>36</sup> For example, within the social field of the school system or classroom, the teacher occupies a position that affords them more power than their students, given the current social structures that govern the space.

to their advantage but they must always contend with the resistance, the claims, the contention, ‘political’ or otherwise, of the dominated (Bourdieu and Waquant, “The Purpose of Reflexive Sociology: The Chicago Workshop” 102). Making a social field function to the advantage of those who occupy a dominant position within it is achieved, in turn, largely through the maintenance and manipulation of the social structures that constitute a given field and guide the conduct of individuals within it.

This is because the objective structures of a social field work to produce what Bourdieu terms *habitus*. According to Bourdieu, habitus are systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (*Outline of a Theory of Practice* 72).

Essentially, the habitus of any given social field is the set of general principles which both generate and structure the practices or activity of individuals within that field by predisposing them towards certain modes of conduct. These general principles are not explicitly stated or formulated rules that are forcibly applied or orchestrated by a “conductor” to govern the conduct of individuals through direct disciplinary measures, but are rather systems of dispositions that are assimilated by the individual, and that predispose them to act (or react) in certain ways in relation to objective factors in their

social environment (Bourdieu, *Outline for a Theory of Practice* 73-78). As such, habitus allows the individual a level of inventiveness in their everyday practices that the mechanical following of a set of rules would not. However, because this habitus is itself the product of the social structures of a field, it also always tends to “to reproduce the objective structures of which [it is] the product” (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 72) by predisposing individuals to act in accordance with those structures. Habitus can thus work to produce and maintain the domination of some individuals over others within a given field by guiding individuals to engage in everyday practices that reproduce social structures that position them into dominant or dominated positions within the field.

The habitus of a given social field, in turn, is assimilated by individuals in a semi-automatic, largely unconscious and non-cognitive process of learning. For Bourdieu, the system of dispositions that constitute a habitus are transmitted without going directly through consciousness, while simultaneously not being the mechanical product of learning through trial and error (*Outline of a Theory of Practice* 88). Because habitus are not expressed explicitly through systems of rules, they cannot be cognitively memorized or taken on fully through the intention or choice of the individual. Rather, one’s habitus is determined and instilled largely by one’s experience of the material and social conditions in which one lives (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 78). These material and social structures are “read” by the body, which takes on their dispositions (habitus) in a quasi-automatic way (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 90). The individual is thus able to grasp the underlying rationales of the structures of social reality without necessarily perceiving these rationales cognitively, and comes to take up the principles of

social structures in the form of a habitus that generates conduct organized in accordance with the structures that produced it (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 88). In this sense, the individual whose practices are largely governed and structured by the habitus of a field (which is itself the product of that field's social structures) comes to *embody* the social structures of the field, while the social structures themselves and the way that they construct the individual's practices remain largely unperceived (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 79).

This is what Bourdieu terms a “bodily hexis”—the embodiment of socio-political structures as permanent dispositions, permanent modes of standing, acting, thinking, and most importantly for this thesis, *feeling* (*Outline of a Theory of Practice* 93). As the individual comes to learn and assimilate the habitus of a field as a durable set of dispositions that generate and govern their everyday practices, they therefore come to embody (as a bodily hexis) the dispositions of the social structures that have produced the habitus, and through their practices and activities, to reproduce those structures. As such, through the intermediary structure of habitus, there “exists a correspondence between social structures and mental structures, between the objective divisions of the social world—particularly into dominant and dominated in the various fields—and the principles of vision and division that agents apply to it” (Bourdieu qtd in Waquant 12). This correspondence between social structures and mental structures, in turn, can help us understand the process by which guilt is instilled in individuals through discourses of personal responsibility.

The social field under investigation within the framework of this project is the neoliberal State, which is constituted by various social structures, including the

institutions and juridical apparatuses of the State, as well as the norms and discourses of neoliberalism. These social structures work to produce a habitus which, as a transposable system of dispositions, comes to structure the practices of the population that occupies the field, guiding the individuals who make up this population towards forms of conduct that align with and reinforce the social structures and relations of power that constitute the State.

Discourses and norms of personal responsibility are one such social structure that works to produce the habitus of the neoliberal State—a habitus which is assimilated quasi-automatically by the individuals who make up the population, and comes to be embodied in part as an affective perception of guilt. This feeling of guilt, as the individual's embodiment of the socio-political structures of the neoliberal State, then generates activity and modes of conduct, practice, and thinking that are structured by the habitus, and which tend to reproduce the social structures that originally produced it (i.e., the State). As has been explained throughout this section, the discourses of personal responsibility that partially produce the habitus of the neoliberal State act as a principle which generates and encourages practices such as the taking on of responsibility for the effects of the vicissitudes of the economic market, and the pursuit of privative solutions to economic problems.

As such, Bourdieu's theory can explain how discourses of personal responsibility work to produce a certain *mode* of subjectivity—the responsible subject of bad conscience, who interiorizes their guilt (or potential guilt) as a constant self-beratement that aligns them with the regime of power that subjects them (Nietzsche *GM* 217-221). As responsibility is totally attributed to the individual, subjects are made to feel guilty for

their own social and economic position, even when their position is the result of factors beyond their control. This affective perception of guilt, in turn, prompts the subject to pursue activities that will ameliorate their guilt *within the conditions permitted*, by taking economically responsible actions and accessing private solutions to economic hardship, rather than relying on social assistance.

Within the framework of neoliberalism, being responsible initially involves remaining economically *productive* by seeking and maintaining employment and engaging in a constant “work on the self” aimed at improving one’s employability and productivity (*BoB* 219-230). Economic responsibility additionally involves accessing private solutions to ameliorate the negative effects that can result from the vicissitudes of the market. Under the conditions of neoliberalism, these privatized economic solutions have increasingly become the ability to access lines of *credit* as a means of temporarily supplementing one’s income (Soederberg 3). As such, we must examine a second mechanism for the production of guilty subjects under neoliberalism—the extension of the creditor-debtor relation through the “democratization of credit” and the circulation of financial debt.

### 3.3 The Extension of the Creditor-Debtor Relation

Alongside the proliferation of discourses of personal responsibility, the extension of the creditor-debtor relation throughout society acts as the primary mechanism for the production of guilty subjects.



As various theorists have noted, the contemporary era is suffused with debt.<sup>37</sup> As the global financial meltdown of 2008 exposed, the contemporary economy is one that is run primarily on the creation and trade of financial debt (Graeber *Debt* 15-16), through the proliferation of sources of consumer credit and the invention of financial products like Asset Backed Securities that allow blocks of debt to be traded on the market to third parties as if debt itself were a commodity (Soederberg 175-177).<sup>38</sup> Indeed, despite its popular labels, the global economy of the contemporary era is not so much an information or knowledge economy, but a *debt economy* (Lazzarato *MOIM* 8).

This transition to a debt economy, and the accompanying spread of debt throughout the social field (along with the creditor-debtor relation that underlies it), has been achieved in the first instance through what Susan Soederberg terms the “democratization of credit,” whereby a greater variety of private lines of credit are extended to the entirety of the population (no matter their ability to repay), while the taking-on of debt is promoted as the best way to engage in the economy and to address problems caused by the vicissitudes of the market (Soederberg 30). Additionally, as the

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<sup>37</sup> See particularly Maurizio Lazzarato’s *The Making of Indebted Man* (Semiotext(e), 2012), David Graeber’s *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Melville House, 2011), and Susan Soederberg’s *Debtfare States and the Poverty Industry: Money, Discipline, and the Surplus Population* (Routledge, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Securitization of debt is a process that began in the early 1970s with the rise of the neoliberal State. It constitutes a “process of packaging individual loans and other debt instruments (otherwise known as ‘assets’), transforming this package into a security or securities and enhancing the credit status or rating to further its sale to third-party investors, such as mutual and pension funds...Securitisation...essentially converts illiquid individual loans, e.g., microloans, into liquid, marketable securities to be bought and sold” (Soederberg 175). Securitization also helps to increase total amounts of debt by allowing creditors to isolate themselves from the risks of making bad loans (i.e., loans to individuals who will be unlikely to repay their debt), thereby expanding the number of persons to whom they can make loans (Soederberg 175), as well as by providing creditors with an additional source of immediate capital that can be lent out (Soederberg 176-177).

neoliberal State seeks to reduce its own role in ameliorating the negative effects of an unregulated market, individuals are discouraged from accessing social services like welfare and housing assistance, while these same social services come to be privatized or operated on the model of credit (Lazzarato *GBD* 66-67). Meanwhile, the ability to procure even the basic means of subsistence within neoliberal States without accessing some form of credit has become increasingly difficult, as real wages have stagnated and opportunities for employment have steadily declined (Soederberg 71-72, 196-198).<sup>39</sup> The combination of these forces—the lack of employment opportunities and stagnation of wages, the reduction and privatization of social services, and the democratization of credit—ensures that the creditor-debtor relation is extended throughout the social field. Because of the growing disparity between opportunities for employment, real wages, and the inflation of the basic costs of living, most individuals within neoliberal States take on some amount of financial debt as a way to access consumer goods and the means of subsistence. Even individuals who are steadily employed and making a decent income tend to carry large debt loads.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> In the prototypical neoliberal State, the United States, “the inflation-adjusted wages of the median worker grew just 6 percent [between 1979 and 2011]” (Soederberg 82) while unemployment rates increased from 6.1 percent in 1978 to 8.9 percent in 2011. Additionally, “[m]ore than one-third of [US] families (37.3%), nearly 19 million families, earned less than the living wage, compared to 20.3% below the poverty line in 2014. Over 8.6 million families (for which living wage comparisons are available) earn above the poverty line, but less than the living wage, leaving them potentially ineligible for benefits including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Free and Reduced Price School Lunches... 86.5% of single parents and 89.8% of single moms earn wages below the living wage. More than half of parents with one adult out of the labor force (51.8%) bring in less than the living wage, compared to 29.9% of parents with both adults in the labor force. More than one-third (37.6%) of single adults living alone also earn less than a living wage” (Glasmeier).

<sup>40</sup> A recent report from Statistics Canada, for example, found that “[i]n recent years, both mortgage debt and consumer debt have increased significantly (Chawla 2011). In 1980, the ratio of household debt to personal disposable income was 66%; that ratio recently passed the 150% figure (Statistics Canada 2011). This means that, in aggregate, households owed more than \$1.50 for every dollar of disposable income”

This taking on of debt has been facilitated through an explosion in the types of consumer credit available to the populations of neoliberal States since the 1990s. Over the past two decades, consumer credit, as a form of “privately created money” produced by corporate enterprises and backed by the State, has been extended to an increasingly large portion of the population in the form of credit cards, payday and student loans, and mortgage loans (Soederberg 1-2, 29). Additionally, access to these new forms of credit has increasingly been granted to low-income, impoverished, and marginalized peoples, who would previously have been coded as high-risk borrowers and denied the ability to take out loans. This access to a wider variety of private financial lending services functions to “democratize” credit by removing “barriers that impede market access, particularly for the poor. In short, the poor are encouraged to participate in the realm of exchange by incurring debt... This is opposed to providing workers with living wages and the public provisioning of safety nets such as unemployment insurance” (Soederberg 74). Under neoliberalism, debt through private lines of credit thus becomes the primary means for individuals to offset the effects of poverty and acquire the basic means of subsistence.

This is because the democratization of credit is generally facilitated by the neoliberal State through forms of legislation that encourage creditors to make loans to

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(Chawla and Uppal 4). In relation to its total value, this debt has been disproportionately taken on by individuals who earn a higher income, as those “who had a household income of at least \$100,000 represented 31% of the population but 37% of those with debt” and held “56% of all household debt” (Chawla and Uppal 5). However, “[e]ven though some groups have higher average debt levels than others, this does not necessarily mean that debt is equally distributed *within* these groups... [and overall] household debt was more unequally distributed within some groups of borrowers than others. Groups with a higher [debt load] included those who had less than a postsecondary education, unattached individuals and people in ‘other’ family types, and those with less than \$50,000 in household income. Because individuals in these groups may have fewer resources to deal with debt payments, the most indebted within these groups may be more at risk of defaulting because they hold a large portion of the group debt” (Chawla and Uppal 6-7).

wider segments of the population (Soederberg 75), and that deregulate usury, thereby encouraging creditors to lend to a greater number of individuals at higher rates of interest (Soederberg 79).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, policies and forms of legislation that encourage and facilitate the expansion of credit as a means of “financial inclusion” (i.e., allowing a greater portion of the population to productively participate in the market via consumption) align with the general principles of the most economically powerful neoliberal States, as represented by the “Principles for Innovative Financial Inclusion” adopted at the G20 summit of 2010 (Soederberg 173). Such forms of legislation are implemented on the assumption that “financial inclusion” through the taking-on of debt “results in ‘economic growth, efficiency and increased welfare’—all of which offset and mitigate the risks of financial exclusion,” while more traditional forms of State provided welfare tend to decrease economic productivity and participation in the market by encouraging laziness and parasitism (Soederberg 175). The expansion of private forms of consumer credit is therefore fostered by the State and presented as the best avenue for individuals to gain access to the products of the market, including basic subsistence needs, while State-provided welfare is reduced overall and increasingly operated on the model of credit.

Alongside the expansion of consumer credit instruments, the creditor-debtor relation and norms of personal responsibility are further extended throughout the population through the transformation of State-provided social services into *public*

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<sup>41</sup> For example, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act in the United States, which legally prohibits creditors from discriminating against any loan applicant on the basis of race, sex, age, or the fact that an applicant’s primary source of income is social assistance.

*creditors* that loan the basic means of subsistence, not as a right of the citizen, but with the expectation of repayment. While previously, on the Welfare State model, the basic means of subsistence were (theoretically, at the very least) guaranteed to all citizens as a fundamental right, the neoliberal State increasingly offers the means of subsistence as a debt to be repaid (Lazzarato *MOIM* 103-104). Take, for example, the increase in programs like welfare-to-work (or workfare)—a natural outgrowth of neoliberal austerity measures which compel subjects to take upon themselves the costs and risks externalized by the State and corporations. Rather than providing the basic means of subsistence as a right of the citizen, welfare-to-work programs act as creditors, loaning the conditions for bare life with the requirement that the beneficiary *repay their debt*—not in money, but in ongoing conduct and obedience (Soederberg 58-59).<sup>42</sup> To receive the means of subsistence, the welfare recipient must submit to an invasive and ongoing evaluation of every aspect of their life in order to prove that they are behaving properly, that they are looking for work, that their style of life can be coded as “normal,” useful, and

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<sup>42</sup> An example of one such workfare program is Ontario Works, which is an extension of the Ontario Works Act of 1997. To receive financial assistance (including health benefits) under Ontario Works, “a client must agree to participate in employment assistance activities” which “help clients find, prepare for and keep a job” and include “workshops on resume writing and interviewing, job counselling, job-specific training, and access to basic education, so clients can finish high school or improve their language skills” (“Overview”). Furthermore, under Section 6.13 of the “Ontario Works Social Assistance Policy Directives”: “Financial assistance may be reduced when a member of a benefit unit is found to be non-compliant because of their: failure or refusal to participate in employment assistance activities, failure to accept or maintain employment, unapproved absence from Ontario, and/or failure to comply with other eligibility criteria as required...In situations of non-compliance, financial assistance is refused or cancelled for a single applicant or recipient.” Compliance, in turn, is assessed through “participation reviews” which are “conducted on a regular basis to ensure recipients are meeting their eligibility requirements and are making progress toward preparing for, finding and maintaining employment” (Section 9.1), and which may include “home visits” to the client that “occur with or without notice to the applicant or participant” and are performed “in order to collect or verify information necessary for determining initial or ongoing eligibility for assistance” (Section 2.8). See also pages 130-137 of Lazzarato’s *The Making of the Indebted Man*, in which he provides transcriptions from interviews with welfare recipients in France who have been forced to undergo extremely invasive home visits from social workers in order to access assistance.

economically productive—in short, that they are actively participating in the market (Lazzarato *MOIM* 130-137). If not, their right to subsistence is revoked, or they are required to work demeaning jobs for sub-minimum wages in order to pay back their loan. Because it is able to leverage various types of force against welfare recipients in order to ensure their repayment (i.e., invasive home visits, mandatory work, etc.), the State thus becomes a “*super-creditor*...meaning that it has limitless powers (to garnish wages, tax refunds and even Social Security payments) and unlimited time (no statute of limitations) to collect” (Soederberg 115).

In the neoliberal State, the creditor-debtor relation is thus extended throughout the social field, down to the most vulnerable members of society. Furthermore, as a result of the suppression of wages, lack of employment opportunities, the increase in predatory lending practices and interest rates, and the transformation of social welfare into a form of credit, “the debt of today’s capitalism is unpayable, unreimbursable, and *infinite*... The form contemporary debt takes resembles at once an ‘apparent settlement’ (we go from one debt to another, take out credit and repay it, and so on) and an ‘unlimited postponement’ in which one is continually indebted and the debt is never (and must never be) honored” (*GBD*, emphasis added 89). Under the conditions of neoliberalism, the individual is thus perpetually indebted and continuously subject to the creditor-debtor relation, the affective condition of which is *guilt*.

As explored in the previous chapter in relation to Nietzsche’s genealogy of guilt, the creditor-debtor relation works to produce the affective condition of guilt. As we may recall, for Nietzsche, the affective feeling of guilt originates from the oldest relationship between human beings, that of creditor and debtor (*GM* 202), as evinced by the

etymological similarities between the terms for guilt and indebtedness (*GM* 194). This is because the relation between creditor and debtor necessarily entails a judgment against the debtor—a judgment as to the value of the debtor, not only in economic terms, but as “a ‘subjective’ measure of value...not only are the skills and know-how of the [debtor] evaluated, so too are [their] actions in society (social ‘virtues,’ ‘conduct,’ ‘reputation’), that is...[their] very *existence*” (Lazzarato *MOIM* 59).<sup>43</sup> To be indebted involves being held responsible and accountable to one’s creditor, both to eventually repay what is owed and to ensure that this repayment can happen by engaging in productive behaviours. As such, “the debtor’s future actions must be molded...Future behavior and conduct must be structured and controlled. Within neoliberalism, what the institution judges, appraises, and measures is, in the end, the style of life of individuals, who must be made to conform to the conception of the ‘good life’ of the economy. Evaluations reflect the modes of existence, the ways of being of those who judge and, thus, of the economy” (Lazzarato *MOIM* 132)—and currently existing structures of power.

As creditors are capable of mobilizing various types of force in order to extract payments from delinquent debtors, while debtors are provided few (if any) means of

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<sup>43</sup> One contemporary mechanism for making and applying such judgments is credit scoring and reporting through analytic frameworks like FICO Scores, which, being framed as mathematical formulas designed to measure the risk of loan default by taking into account various parts of an individual debtor’s financial history, “are seen to determine objectively the amount and terms of a loan (e.g., length of time, interest rates, fees, etc.)” (Soederberg 76). These judgments constitute an abstract measure of subjective worth, but have real material effects on those who are judged, as they may determine an individual’s ability to access credit in the future or even to obtain employment. As such, the judgments of creditors “facilitate disciplinary measures regarding debtors’ payment practices. If a borrower is late making a payment and is maxing out on lines of credit...his/her credit rating is immediately affected, potentially making access to future credit more expensive...In the United States, where employers’ credit checks are the norm, a poor credit rating may also result in the denial of paid employment, thereby reinforcing the multidimensionality and rewards of being a good market citizen. Ironically, poor credit scores in the United States are largely linked to unemployment, lack of health coverage and medical debt” (Soederberg 76).

discharging their debts,<sup>44</sup> the relation of debt constitutes a relation of power, in which the creditor has an imbalanced amount of power over the debtor (Lazzarato *GBD* 223-224).<sup>45</sup> Being held responsible for one's debts by a powerful creditor, in turn, acts as a form of mnemotechnics that works to subject the individual, in the sense of both "becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject" (Butler *PLP* 2). By taking on debt, the individual is subjected to the external power of their creditor, who has provided them with the means of existence, and is seen to judge and appraise them in view of repayment.

Being subjected in this way by a power to which the individual is indebted is experienced by the individual as an affective feeling of *guilt*—a continuous and

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<sup>44</sup> The ability of creditors to enact force onto debtors in order to extract debt payments is derived from the backing that creditors receive from the neoliberal State through various forms of legislation. One notorious example of such legislation is the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act (BAPCPA), which was enacted in the United States in April of 2005. According to Soederberg, "The BAPCPA...not only increased the costs to file for bankruptcy, but also removed the right of debtors to choose between Chapter 7 bankruptcy (which discharges all debts) and Chapter 13 bankruptcy (requiring a repayment plan). If workers wish to file under Chapter 7, they must subject themselves to and pass, an intrusive and humiliating means test; if the debtor fails the means test, the bankruptcy must be filed under Chapter 13, if filed at all", essentially removing the ability for debtors to discharge their debts through bankruptcy, as "[u]nder Chapter 13...[the State] determines how much a debtor must repay, based on their disposable income for five years, thereby also lengthening the repayment plan from three years" (96). Additionally, "[t]he BAPCPA also permits creditors (banks) to threaten debtors with costly litigation. Debtors, many of whom cannot afford to defend themselves in court, will be coerced into giving up their legal rights" while BAPCPA also makes it "easier for a residential landlord to evict a tenant who is in bankruptcy, even if the tenant has paid back rent" (Soederberg 96). Through such forms of legislation, the State thus empowers creditors to coerce debtors into repayment, or to extract payments for longer periods of time through the imposition of harsh repayment plans.

<sup>45</sup> While David Graeber has recently presented the creditor-debtor relation as fundamentally based on *equality*, and thus relatively power-neutral or equally empowering to both parties (Graeber *Debt* 86-87), his conception seems to misunderstand the basis of debt. Debt implies a fundamental imbalance wherein one party (the creditor) possesses something another (the debtor) requires but cannot currently offer anything in exchange for. The creditor is thus presented with the power to loan, or refuse to loan, what is required by the debtor, and to set the conditions for repayment of this loan. This is why Nietzsche finds the creditor-debtor relation to be the fundamental social relation of power, as "debt does not imply equality and reciprocity but their opposites. If credit-debt and not exchange represents the archetype of social organization, it is because the forces in play are not 'equal' but asymmetrical. Credit...is the site where superior and inferior forces confront one another, the purpose of which is constructing a subjectivity 'capable of promising'" and thus of being responsible (Lazzarato *GBD* 86).



uncomfortable sense of their indebtedness, that prompts the individual to act in accordance with the power that has subjected them, pre-emptively avoiding transgression as a means of repaying their debt. The relation of indebtedness to an outside creditor thus works to subject the individual, and instills *guilt* at the very heart of their subjectivity, producing the debtor as a *guilty subject*. Such subjects are eminently useful, as their guilt ensures that they will remain economically active and productive, thus producing the space of the market and increasing the State's "population wealth".

As mentioned previously, the pain and discomfort of guilt guides the individual both to reflect on their own being and modes of behaviour in relation to the power that has subjected them (Butler *PLP* 67-68, 74-75), and to engage in reparative activity that conforms to the demands of the other who has prompted their guilt (Nelissen et al. 360). The discomfort of guilt acts as an incentive to cancel the debt that has produced it in order to relieve the discomfort, thereby moving the subject who feels guilt to engage in reparative actions (Ghorbani et al. 313). In the creditor-debtor relation, such acts of reparation are necessarily directed towards the creditor, and are aimed at repaying the creditor as a means of cancelling the debt for which they feel guilty. The feeling of guilt moves the subject to conform to the expectations of repayment set out by their creditors, and to monitor their behaviour in relation to social norms and standards of "good" economic behaviour as a way to achieve the means of repayment. In the contemporary situation, this involves not simply seeking and maintaining gainful employment in order to acquire the means to repay one's debts, but a taking-on of personal responsibility for the constant and consistent evaluation of oneself—one's choices, conduct, mode of being, etc.—in relation to the standards of the market.

The most important of these standards is *productivity*—the demand that each individual be economically active and productive, not only during work hours, but across the whole span of their life. Under neoliberalism, it is expected that each individual will engage in a constant “work on the self” to improve their “human capital” (Foucault *BoB* 219-230). This “work on the self” in part involves attempts to improve one’s overall employability and worth as a market citizen through various investments of time and money into education, skills training, and health, alongside adjustments to one’s comportment and style of life—conforming one’s behaviour to be normative and non-risky, while remaining active in the approved circuits of economic production and consumption.

Ironically, the investments made through “work on the self” often help to *increase* an individual’s debt load, thereby perpetuating their guilt. Educational investments are paradigmatic in this regard. There has increasingly been a shift away from public support for education in neoliberal States, placing the financial burden of educational investment onto individual students. Meanwhile, tuition costs for post-secondary education and skills training have steadily increased, leaving student loans as the primary (or only) means for many to access post-secondary education (Soederberg 107). Students are encouraged to take on loans in order to finance post-secondary education or skills training, which (it is hoped) will increase their ability to obtain a well-paying job that will allow them to pay off their debts.<sup>46</sup> In reality, the promise of obtaining better employment prospects after

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<sup>46</sup> The United States is the obvious example indicating the extent to which student loans have exploded as a means of financing educational investments. As Lazzarato notes, “A recent report from the New York Federal Reserve on US household debt presented data on American student indebtedness. On March 31, 2012, the total amount students had borrowed and still owed in order to finance their university studies

graduation is often not fulfilled, and the educational investments made by the individual do not result in a wage capable of paying back their debts (Soederberg 108).<sup>47</sup> As a result, the injunction to be productive and engage in “work on the self” that the guilt of debt mobilizes only results in *more debt*, and the perpetuation of the affective perception of guilt associated with it.

By willingly taking on this “work on the self”, it is promised that the individual will be freed from the bonds of their debt and be able to relieve their guilt, when in reality “work on the self” is nothing more than “an injunction to become one’s own boss, in the sense of ‘taking upon oneself’ the costs and risks that business and the State externalize onto society” (Lazzarato *MOIM* 93). In the end, the creditor’s injunctions to be productive and engage in “work on the self” in order to achieve repayment only function to *further* subject the individual by making the process of subjectivation emanate from *the subject themselves*. As Lazzarato explains, “the norm remains external...but everything occurs as if the norm originated in the individual...The order and command

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reached \$904 billion, \$30 billion more than just three months earlier. The number is equal to over half of the public debt of Italy and France...In the US, two-thirds of university students graduate in debt. Today thirty-seven million people have gone into debt in order to complete their diploma. Students are indebted before entering the job market and stay indebted for life” (*GBD* 64-65). By comparison, the total student debt in Canada is much smaller, but rising steadily. As of September 2010, “the total amount of student loans owed to the government reached \$15 billion, the legislated ceiling set by the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act. This figure only accounts for a portion of total student debt; it does not include provincial and personal loans, lines of credit, and education-related credit card debt. In response, the government altered the definition of ‘student loan’ to exclude over \$1.5 billion in federal student loan debt” while “students studying in Ontario and the Maritimes have...debt loads averaging more than \$28,000” (Canadian Federation of Students 1).

<sup>47</sup> In the United States, for example, “[m]any students carrying an average debt load (and higher) do not earn a median income immediately after graduation. Aside from poor employment prospects, ‘more young graduates were considered underemployed. Among those who wanted to be working full time, as many as 19.1 percent were either working part time or had given up looking for work. Further, 37.8 percent of working young graduates had jobs that did not require a college degree, depressing their wages’ (The Project on Student Debt, 2012: 2)” (Soederberg 108).

must appear to issue from the subject, because ‘you’re in control!’ because ‘you’re your own boss!’ because ‘you’re your own manager!’ Contemporary subjection subjects the individual to ‘infinite’ evaluation and makes the subject his own primary judge” (*GBD* 186-187). While the judgment and subjection that produce guilt originate from outside the debtor (from the creditor), they come to be internalized and re-enacted by the individual against themselves as their guilt guides them to conform their behaviour to the dominant standards of neoliberalism, which require a constant self-evaluation on the part of the individual. This self-evaluation and judgment only produces more guilt as “the promises of self-realization...and autonomy” that accompany the injunction to engage in “work on the self” come to “collide with a reality that systematically nullifies them” (Lazzarato *GBD* 186), thus beginning a cycle in which guilt and its self-beratements become *infinite*.<sup>48</sup>

As explained in the previous chapter, this infinite guilt is the mark of the subject of bad conscience who remains responsible and in control, and “represents a determined attempt to invert the normal order of development” (*GM* 224-225) towards the “sovereign individual” who could move beyond the norms and standards of the neoliberal State and become a disruptive or risky element. By working to extend the creditor-debtor relation throughout the social field, the neoliberal State is able to guide the process of

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<sup>48</sup> This is because, no matter how productive the subject becomes, it is unlikely that they will ever pay off their debts. While the discourses of personal responsibility examined in the previous section encourage debtors to believe that the ability to pay off loans is tied solely to one’s willingness to make good financial decisions and engage in productive activity (i.e., work hard and save money), the reality is that the average wages that people earn (and thus their ability to pay debts) are not at all tied to their productivity. For example, in the United States “productivity has increased 80.4 percent from 1979 to 2011, [while] the inflation-adjusted wages of the median worker grew just 6 percent and that growth occurred exclusively as a result of the strong economy of the late 1990s” (Soederberg 82).

subjectivation towards increasingly producing the guilty subject of bad conscience, whose affective perception of guilt ensures their economic productivity and self-management, which creates the space of the market. This guided process of subjectivation constitutes a biopolitical project wherein the State produces the kinds of subjects it needs, thereby pre-emptively preventing disruptive behaviour, rather than retroactively punishing disruptive individuals.

Furthermore, the guilt produced by the creditor-debtor relation acts as a mechanism of management and control at the level of life itself. Subjecting individuals in such a way as to produce the guilty subject of bad conscience, the creditor-debtor relation works as a technique of power that instills a mechanism of control *within the debtors themselves*. Prompted by the feelings of guilt that the creditor-debtor relation instills, debtors become their *own managers*, taking on the responsibility of managing their behaviour and mode of life in view of repayment, rather than questioning the structural forces that have led to their taking on debt, or the exploitative relations of power they have been subjected to by accessing credit. In this sense, the affective life of the subject becomes a means of control—one which does not require the discrete spaces and external managers of disciplinary techniques, but rather follows the subject across the entirety of their day-to-day existence, throughout their entire lives, ensuring that they willingly remain a productive market citizen (Lazzarato *GBD* 69-70).

It is my contention that this constitutes a form of *voluntary servitude*. In the final section of this chapter, I will delineate how discourses of personal responsibility and the extension of the creditor-debtor relation throughout society combine to produce an environment of subjectivation that guides individuals to become guilty subjects of bad

conscience, who willingly maintain themselves in positions of subordination and thus enter into a form of voluntary servitude.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have examined how an affective perception of guilt is cultivated and mobilized in the neoliberal State through the circulation of discourses of personal responsibility and the extension of the creditor-debtor relation throughout the social field. It is my contention that the features of the neoliberal State that have been analyzed in this chapter constitute an environment of subjectivation that guides individuals to become subjects of bad conscience, instilling a sense of guilt at the heart of their subjectivity—a sense of guilt which works as a biopolitical mechanism of control that follows the individual across the entirety of their lives and moves them to engage in activities that are economically productive, rather than disruptive to the market and the State.

This environment of subjectivation is constituted by the intersection of discourses of responsibility and the creditor-debtor relation. The circulation of discourses of personal responsibility intersects with the infinite debts produced through the expansion of the creditor-debtor relation as a means of producing and reinforcing the indebted individual's sense of guilt. Discourses of personal responsibility encourage individuals to view their economic position as solely the result of their own choices and behaviours, and to subsequently seek private means of supplementing their income in order to correct discrepancies between their income and ability to access resources like housing, food, and consumer goods. Within the neoliberal State, these private economic solutions have increasingly become the ability to take on lines of credit. But once credit has been

accessed as an individual economic solution, discourses of personal responsibility work to ensure that the individual takes responsibility for their debts, framing the decision to take on debt as a wholly personal choice, unmotivated by external factors like the inability to find adequate employment, stagnated wages, or increasing costs of living. Taking full responsibility for their debts, the debtor is moved to evaluate themselves on the basis of the market, assessing the economic implications of their choices, behaviours, and lifestyle in view of repayment. As has been explained in the previous sections of this chapter, the debtor is subsequently subjected, first by the judgments and power of their creditor, and then by their own internalized self-evaluation and judgments. This process of subjectivation, in turn, produces the subject of bad conscience, who experiences their subjectivity as an affective feeling of guilt.

By encouraging individuals to conceptualize the decision to enter into the creditor-debtor relation as an entirely free choice for which each person must hold themselves fully accountable, discourses of personal responsibility work to obscure the various structural factors that lead individuals to take on debt, as well as the exploitative nature of the creditor-debtor relation, making the individual feel *guilty* for their need to take on various debts and general inability to ever fully repay them. By increasingly being guided into the creditor-debtor relation while simultaneously being held personally responsible for taking on debt, the individual is made to feel guilty for their decisions, and to engage in forms of self-beratement, rather than critique of the structures of power that have led to their indebtedness. As such, “guilt and fear make up the ‘passions’ of the neoliberal relation to the self, because the promises of self-realization...and autonomy collide with a reality that systematically nullifies them... ‘Complaints’ are turned against

oneself instead of relations of power. Hence the guilt” (Lazzarato *GBD* 186-87). Instead of critically examining the systemic factors and structures of power that have made their indebtedness necessary, this guilt serves to align the individual with those structures of power by prompting them to engage in economically productive behaviours in view of repaying the debts for which they feel responsible.

Thus, the guilt provoked by the intersection of the creditor-debtor relation and neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility, along with the productive activity it moves the subject to engage in, constitute a form of *voluntary servitude*. While the forces that initially instill the subject’s guilt originate externally to the subject themselves, the continued control, management, and subordination of the subject comes to emanate from their own affective life. Guilty subjects do not require coercion or direct disciplinary interventions to ensure that they engage in activities useful to the State—they do so of their own accord. Despite the fact that they have largely been placed into relations of domination and subjugation by forces beyond their control, the subject who feels guilt for their own subject position will accept these imbalanced relations of power, and end up working to perpetuate them, rather than seeking to critique or move beyond them. The repetition and perpetuation of these imbalanced power relations by the guilty subject, in turn, works to cement them into *domination*, forming “the basis of institutions such as the State” which is “merely an effect of power relations that have crystallized into relations of domination” (Newman 119-120). Through their guilt, the State as a form of domination is thus maintained and reproduced by the subject themselves. The guilty subject comes to be a participant in their own domination, insofar as their guilt leads



them to engage in voluntary servitude, and the State is preserved against subjects who would seek to critique or go beyond it.

The production of guilty subjects thus functions as a means of preserving the neoliberal State by pre-emptively foreclosing the risk of disruption, and leading individuals into voluntary servitude and productive activity.

## Conclusion

Through this thesis, I have attempted to provide at least a theoretical account of how the political condition of voluntary servitude is produced and maintained in the contemporary era of biopolitical States and neoliberal debt economies. Following recent lines of affect theory, my purpose has been to demonstrate how one particular emotion—guilt—can be used to produce the political condition of voluntary servitude by attaching individuals to the dominant structures and arrangements of power that have prompted their guilt in the first place, moving them to reproduce these structures by engaging in reparative activities and circulations that conform to normative standards of behaviour. Furthermore, I have proposed that, in the contemporary era, this constitutes a biopolitical project mobilized by the State, aimed at managing populations by constructing guilty subjects of bad conscience through a controlled process of subjectivation. It is my contention that this process is prompted in relation to discourses of personal responsibility and the proliferation of financial debt, which act as the dominant norms and mnemotechnics of the contemporary neoliberal State.

As such, this thesis has constituted a diagnostic, rather than prescriptive, project.<sup>49</sup>

I have not attempted to provide an outline for political action, nor have I even suggested a

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<sup>49</sup> Though, of course, any diagnostic reading of social and political structures is in itself a *practice* performed with particular intentions. In the case of this thesis, my intention has been to expose the way that guilt is not simply or only a “natural” emotional response, but is often induced and provoked by social structures for the political purpose of producing and reproducing domination. As such, the practical purpose of performing this diagnostic has been “to denaturalize and to defatalize the social world, that is, to destroy the myths that cloak the exercise of power and the perpetuation of domination. But debunking is not done for the purpose of castigating others and inducing guilt [which would be a cruel irony in the case of this thesis]. Quite the opposite: the mission... is to ‘*necessitate* conducts, to tear them away from arbitrariness by reconstituting the universe of constraints which determine them, without justifying them’” (Bourdieu qtd. in Waquant 50).

clear means of escaping the affective perception of guilt which I have diagnosed as the root of voluntary servitude within the biopolitical and neoliberal State. And yet, I believe such a diagnosis to be both timely and necessary: timely, insofar as it attempts to understand the modes of political subjection and mechanisms of domination prevalent in our own time and social field; and necessary in order to begin thinking and acting against the political structures that dominate us while obscuring the means of their domination. It is my position that if we do not wish to remain indebted or dominated forever, it is necessary to understand how the internalization of guilt as “bad conscience” makes us complicit in our own subjugation and structural injustices.

In keeping with these sentiments, I will conclude this thesis by examining some contemporary situations in which guilt is being used as a political tool to reinforce the dominant structures of power. I will begin with the ongoing economic crisis in Greece.

Greece’s sovereign debt-crisis offers an interesting and striking example of how financial debt and discourses of personal responsibility are being mobilized as an attempt to instill guilt within a State’s population, and how this installation of guilt has affected the forms of political activity taking place within that particular State. It must be remembered that, with the political riots of December 2008—in which, for more than a month, students, workers, and other citizens took to the streets in unprecedented numbers to express their frustrations over Greece’s failing economy, rising rates of unemployment for the young, and the general corruption of Greek public officials—Greece seemed poised on the edge of major social transformation. As Yiannis Kaplanis has observed:

The massive participation, its scale, and particularly its length suggest that the events of December [2008] were more than an explosion, a riot, or

civil unrest. If that were the case, they would have calmed after the first two or three days. However the protests, occupations, general meetings lasted for over a month, while the massive violent confrontations on the street with the police lasted for about two weeks and sporadically continued over the rest of the period...What probably distinguishes them is the spontaneity and intensity of the struggle at the same time that there was no single demand, group, collective, party, or force behind that drove it forward. The events surpassed the people who participated in them...In that respect, the question of what was December had been answered in the streets by the same people who participated in it—*December was a 'revolt'* (223).

Indeed, the riots seemed to produce unruly subjects who acted against the current arrangements of power on a mass scale. These unruly subjects simultaneously refused to make demands of the dominant institutions of governance, as such demands could provide an opportunity for their political activity and revolt to be recuperated back into the dominant power structures of the State.

Yet, this massive revolt against domination was to be short-lived. As economic crisis<sup>50</sup> hit the country in the early months of 2009, destroying its credit reliability rating,

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<sup>50</sup> As Christos Lynteris notes, any form of “crisis” should not simply be seen as an objective state of affairs, but also a political strategy, because labeling an event or series of events as a “crisis” allows political authorities to dictate an “appropriate” response to the event. He writes:

the transformation of any event into a crisis presupposes a decision of a most sovereign nature, which renders it thinkable and intelligible, and at the same time a field or object of action, in terms of a rhythm in the most classical sense of the term: as a stasis, a formation of manageable and stable schemata out of an ungovernable flow of movements...If December 2008 was experienced as a totally-unexpected-event, an event that in all its force (beautiful or horrible, but certainly a

the Greek government took on a massive bailout loan from the European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB), and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (colloquially known as “the troika”) in order to avoid default on its sovereign debt. This loan was conditional on the Greek government’s implementation of economic austerity measures, structural reforms, and the privatization of social services—all of which aimed at imposing neoliberal norms and standards onto the Greek population.<sup>51</sup> Simultaneously, a narrative and discourse of personal responsibility began to circulate in Greece and abroad, spurred on by remarks made by German Chancellor Angela Merkel,<sup>52</sup> that the

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force) shook all the conceptual, imaginary, political, economic, and desiring chains of social formation in Greece...we [now] stand before an officially sanctioned and governmentally organised Economic Crisis, a structural counter-event that we always-already anticipated. A counter-event that, if it fails to explain December 2008, certainly manages to substitute it as the true field of decisions, as the real crisis, imposing its rhythm on the social. In other words, the organization of today’s Economic Crisis objectively compromises a governmental fidelity to the December Uprising, a fidelity which, rather than problematizing December itself, rises against it as an apparatus of problems that demand immediate solutions, emergency measures, and sacrifices under the star of national unity as the necessary rhythm of the social, *as the general and always enduring debt/guilt towards society* (emphasis added, 210).

As such, the economic crisis in Greece should not be seen simply as an objective “event,” but also as a strategy used by the Greek State to impose a static “rhythm of the social” that preserves the dominant arrangement of power against the opposing “rhythm” of the December riots. And as noted in the quote above, this “rhythm of the social” is constituted by a sense of *infinite guilt*.

<sup>51</sup> In order to receive their bail-out package, the Greek government was compelled to sign the “Memorandum of Cooperation” which laid out that “Greece would borrow €110 billion from IMF and EU countries at a high rate of 5%...At the same time the Greek government committed itself to imposing new economic austerity measures that would enable it to drastically reduce its budget deficit and restructure its economy along the lines of its lenders” (Kaplanis 216). Some of these austerity measures include a reduction in collective wage agreements and workers’ rights, “reductions to spending on education and health...and an increase in heating oil tax rate, while there is a reduction of the tax rate for corporate profits from 24% to 20%. At the same time, the deregulation of the labour market...also now affect[s] wages in the private sector, with expected cuts between 10-40% (depending on the different sectoral pay agreements that are being now subordinated to firm agreements)” (Kaplanis 226). As such, the economic crisis has been “not only an opportunity for curbing corruption and tax evasion...but also an opportunity to deregulate the labour markets, cut labour costs, restructure the pension system, reduce the provision of welfare, and expand the private market to sectors such as energy, transport, health, and education. It is a class-base restructuring that serves the interests of the ‘big capital,’ both the local and its international partners” (Kaplanis 226-227).

<sup>52</sup> In 2011, Chancellor Merkel suggested that people in Greece worked too little, retired too early, and took too many vacations to be considered economically responsible—a refrain that was taken up repeatedly by

Greek debt crisis was the result of the laziness and personal irresponsibility of the Greek people themselves.<sup>53</sup>

In reality, Greece's economic crisis can more legitimately be attributed to various intersecting structural factors, such as its conversion to the Euro in 2001 (Kaplanis 218), large wage inequities between the poor and rich (Kaplanis 217-221), a general lack of funding for essential social services, combined with rampant government spending on the 2004 Olympic Games (Kaplanis 221-222) and military expenditures (Graeber, "The Greek Debt Crisis in Almost Unimaginably Long-Term Historical Perspective" 229-230). But by holding the Greek population responsible for both the country's economic collapse and the subsequent bailout loan, these discourses of personal responsibility and the loan conditions of the troika have essentially transformed the entire Greek population into a mass of debtors, forcing them to capitulate to the demands of their country's creditors or face the prospect of being dropped from the European Union, which would assuredly further destroy their country's economic standing.

This transformation of the Greek population into debtors seems particularly aimed at producing guilty subjects who will dutifully pursue work and personally take on "the

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news media when reporting on the crisis. For Merkel, the conditions imposed on Greece by the IMF and EU were about "not being able to retire earlier in countries such as Greece, Spain, Portugal than in Germany, instead everyone should try a little bit to make the same efforts—that is important... We can't have a common currency where some get lots of vacation time and others very little. That won't work in the long term... Germany will help but Germany will only help when the others try" (Pop).

<sup>53</sup> This, of course, is a completely false and unsubstantiated claim. As Lazzarato explains:

The Greeks, it turns out, are the reigning champions of work at 2,119 hours a year. They 'work' 52% more than the Germans (1,380 hours). The Greeks also work longer. In Greece, 31% of the population aged 59 and 65 work, compared to 23% in Germany. According to the OECD, labor productivity (GDP output per hour worked) is \$34 in Greece, compared to \$57 in the US, \$55 in France, and \$53 in Germany... The logical conclusion for the financier: the more you work, the deeper in debt you go (*MOIM* 194).

costs and risks of the economic and financial disaster” (Lazzarato *MOIM* 9) as a means of relieving their guilt and escaping debt. As has been explored throughout this thesis, the creditor-debtor relation acts as the basic means of instilling guilt within debtors, while discourses of personal responsibility and the extension of the creditor-debtor relation throughout society constitute the basic mechanisms for the production of guilty subjects within the neoliberal State. In the Greek situation, these mechanisms have been applied to the population *en masse* through environmental forms of intervention aimed at exciting economic productivity and competition, rather than through disciplinary mechanisms applied to individual bodies, thereby constituting these mechanisms as an exercise of biopower. As Lazzarato explains: “Through public debt entire societies become indebted” and this debt “[plunges] us into the existential condition of the indebted man, at once *responsible and guilty* for his particular fate” because “debt represents an economic relationship inseparable from the production of the debtor subject and his ‘morality’” of guilt (*MOIM*, emphasis added 8-9). The Greek debt crisis and bailout should thus be read as biopolitical measures designed to remold the population into guilty subjects of bad conscience.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The Greek communist group Ta Paidia Tis Galarias (TPTG), “The Children of the Gallery,” come to the same conclusion themselves when they write that, with the imposition of the troika’s austerity measures,

fiscal terrorism attempts to become more effective at targeting, through the collective responsibility of the debts, *our own subjectivity*. The storm of the imminent threats against ‘our’ national economy aims at the internalisation of the crisis as fear and guilt: ‘our’ debts...should become our collective guilt...Thus, the original sin recurs even more violently to make us...pledge our already low wages, our already labour intensified life, our very expectations for a world where capitalist domination will be history. They want us to pledge our own claims for life liberated of debts and guilt now and in the future; to become indebted with the burden of a depressingly insecure present so that we eliminate even from our imagination any possibility of abolishing this old, burdened with guilt and debt, world (emphasis added, 246).

But how effective have these measures been in producing guilty subjects? While it is impossible to know exactly “how much” guilt these measures have induced, we may note that the insurrectionary movements that started with the riots of December 2008 mostly dissipated shortly after the Greek government received its bailout package and began implementing the conditions of its creditors, while State-sanctioned forms of political and economic activity (such as voting for political representatives, petitions, and referendums) have taken their place (TPTG 260-270). Perhaps this can be read as an effect of the guilt produced by the troika’s austerity measures and the circulation of discourses of personal responsibility, which has worked to realign many of those who engaged in the unruly insurrectionary actions of 2008 towards a program of national and State unity. As the Greek communist group TPTG explain:

The ‘debt crisis’ offers the capitalist state a unique opportunity to re-impose the unification of the proletariat around the nation-state form and through that its disciplining, in the hope of an increasing productivity and higher profits... Since crisis is experienced as a multitude of personal failures bound together (‘living beyond our means’ summarizes the individual ‘excesses’ and ‘malfunctions’ that led to our ‘national failure’), self-blame and guilt can take [on] epidemic dimensions... The state ideologues, on their part, who know that in periods of crises capital and its state are no longer trustworthy since the ‘rewards promised’ never came... are all too willing to channel anger and fear to a path safer for the system... [T]o the ‘irresponsible strikers’ who betray the ‘national cause’ through struggle, the prime minister was clear when he declared: ‘Sacrifices are needed; we cannot afford blockades and strikes’ (271-272).



Mobilizing the population's guilt by externalizing onto its citizens the effects of its sovereign debt while also holding them personally responsible for the ongoing economic crisis, the Greek State thus works to "channel [the population's] anger and fear to a path safer for the system" by encouraging them to make personal "sacrifices" instead of engaging in strikes or other collective political actions.

However, as the neoliberal austerity measures imposed by the Greek government have become more extreme while rates of poverty have continued to grow, the population has increasingly become vocally opposed to accepting responsibility for the State's sovereign debt. Indeed, the recent referendum in Greece, in which a majority of the country's population voted against accepting the conditions for repayment proposed by Greece's creditors, would seem to act as an example of a *rejection* of the guilt produced by debt. The Greek people, rather than dutifully accepting responsibility for the State's debts and quietly submitting themselves to the measures of economic austerity proposed by its creditors, voted to refuse these conditions in a symbolic rejection of guilt and responsibility (Stamouli and Bouras).

And yet, I would argue that this symbolic rejection still demonstrates an *attachment* to the State and its social conditions—a form of "soft" transgression against guilt that can be recuperated and managed by the State. Unlike the unruly actions of the 2008 rioters, which placed a large segment of Greece's population into direct opposition with State forces, the recent referendum was in itself a form of political activity orchestrated by the State—one which has, as of yet, produced no results that would threaten State domination or provide any debt relief for the Greek population (Taylor and

Maltezou).<sup>55</sup> By providing the referendum as a means of symbolically rejecting the guilt and responsibility imposed on them without engaging in “unruly” political actions, the Greek State was *still* able to “channel [the population’s] anger and fear to a path safer for the system” (TPTG 272). A reactive rejection of guilt would therefore appear to be just as useful in channeling political activity towards the maintenance of the State as a docile submission to guilt’s self-beratements.

But the Greek debt crisis stands as only one instance among many in which guilt—or even a reflexive rejection of guilt—has been used for political purposes in the contemporary era, and it should be noted that it is not always or only State forces that use our guilt in this way. How often are we compelled to take personal responsibility and enact personal solutions to environmental problems by consuming “green” products in order to alleviate our guilt and repay some of our ecological debt, when in reality the very act of consumption reinforces the capitalist forces that have produced the most extreme forms of environmental devastation? How often do supposed charitable organizations or social movements attempt to use our (perhaps justified) guilt as a way to mobilize types of action that at best ameliorate, but often exacerbate, a problem without addressing its underlying causes, thereby extending our guilt and debt by reproducing the very relations of power they try to address? In instances like these, we should ask: what kinds of political action are being mobilized by our guilt? And what effects do these actions produce?

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<sup>55</sup> While the effects of the 2015 Greek referendum are still unfolding, at the time of my writing this Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has just come to a deal with the EU to take on a further €86 billion in bailout debt, and to continue implementing the neoliberal austerity measures that the Greek population voted against.

A powerful answer is provided to these questions by the Indigenous activist group Indigenous Action Media in a recent essay on the difference between political allies and accomplices. They write:

Allies all too often carry romantic notions of oppressed folks they wish to ‘help.’ These are the ally ‘saviors’ who see victims and tokens instead of people. This victimization becomes a fetish for the worst of the allies in forms of exotification, manarchism, ‘splaining, POC sexploitation, etc... Guilt is...a primary ally motivating factor. Even if never admitted, guilt & shame generally function as motivators in the consciousness of an oppressor who realizes that they are operating on the wrong side. While guilt and shame are very powerful emotions, think about what you’re doing before you make another community’s struggle into your therapy session. Of course, acts of resistance and liberation can be healing, but tackling guilt, shame, and other trauma require a much different focus, or at least an explicit and consensual focus. What kind of relationships are built on guilt and shame?...[These kinds of relationships generally foster] exploitation between both the oppressed and oppressor. The ally and the allied-with become entangled in an abusive relationship. Generally neither can see it until it’s too late...No one is here to be saved, we don’t need ‘missionary allies’ or pity (“Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex”).

Guilt motivates us to perform reparative actions as a means of ameliorating our own bad feelings, but these actions often reinforce or reproduce the very relations of power that have caused the situation we feel guilt over. Guilt feelings demand to be addressed, but only within the conditions permitted. We are presented with an endless array of

opportunities that will ostensibly make amends for our guilt, without the risk of becoming complicit in actions that might threaten the current organization of power (which always runs the risk of producing more guilt). We can buy “ethical” products, we can donate to charities, or engage ourselves in charitable actions aimed at “saving” or assimilating the victims of oppression. But as Indigenous Action Media explains, many actions coded as “anti-oppressive” have already been commodified and re-assimilated back into the circuits of capitalist production: “You can now pay hundreds of dollars to go to esoteric institutes for an allyship certificate in anti-oppression. You can go through workshops and receive an allyship badge. In order to commodify struggle it must first be objectified... Where struggle is commodity, allyship is currency” (“Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex”)—a currency that can be used to pay our debts and relieve our guilt. But insofar as these actions only serve to reproduce oppressive structures and relations of domination, they also work to infinitely reproduce our own guilt and indebtedness.

Feelings of guilt may need to be addressed, but not through political action. Rather, political action requires *complicity in struggle*. This is, as Indigenous Action Media explains, the difference between being an *ally* and being an *accomplice* in anti-oppressive struggles: “Accomplices aren’t motivated by personal guilt or shame, they may have their own agenda but they are explicit. Accomplices are realized through mutual consent and build trust. They don’t just have our backs, they are at our side, or in their own spaces confronting and unsettling [domination]. *As accomplices we are compelled to become accountable and responsible to each other, that is the nature of trust*” (“Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex”, emphasis

added). Rather than the subject of bad conscience, who is motivated by a sense of guilt, I would argue that the accomplice resembles Nietzsche's sovereign individual, who is capable of promising and committing themselves to others based on their own values or agenda, rather than a feeling of guilt, a sense of indebtedness, or the threat of punishment.

To move beyond infinite debt, to enact a politics of resistance against the relations of power that dominate and subjugate us, it therefore seems necessary to create new subjectivities, new modes of living, that reject the bad conscience of guilt in favor of something else—perhaps something akin to Nietzsche's sovereign individualism, or maybe simply “finite” and repayable forms of debt and responsibility. While I am wary of individual political solutions that place the burden of responsibility for social transformation onto individual subjects, as these solutions often play into neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility and are easily recuperated by State and capitalist forces that offer private “solutions” to relieve one's guilt and discharge one's debts, I do believe that any social transformation also necessitates subjective transformation—a becoming-unruly, whereby individuals move beyond relations of subjugation and domination.

This need not, and indeed cannot, happen alone, as it involves the creation of new types of social relations, new ways of relating to the world and to each other. As such, I am in no way advocating a complete rejection of responsibility. We are all complicit in the structural injustices that surround us (such structures do not even objectively exist outside our complicity and participation in them), and we must all acknowledge some level of responsibility for the effects of these injustices. Such an acknowledgement can allow for the positive effect of recognizing and seeing the privileges conferred to some

and barred to others by structural or normative relations of power, as well as the position one occupies in relation to these privileges (Marion Young 154-179). I believe this is a fundamentally important first step in the move towards building solidarity in struggle, resisting forms of domination, and changing structures of power. However, I also contend that we must be cautious not to allow this acknowledgement of responsibility to translate into something like the bad conscience of guilt, which as we have seen can attach us to our own domination and move us to engage in actions that reproduce the structures of domination that work to oppress ourselves and others.

Additionally, while I propose that it is important to address the political ramifications of specific emotions, I am also wary of attempts to reflexively label any emotion as “good” or “bad”. The point I have tried to make is not that guilt is, in itself, a “bad” emotion. As I have touched on throughout this project, some level or form of guilt even seems necessary for the production of conscience, the ability to promise, and ultimately, subjectivity itself. Rather, through this thesis I have tried to indicate how guilt can be and currently is *used* by political forces in order to motivate voluntary servitude. I am not sure that this necessitates a total rejection of guilt as an affective condition, but I do think it requires us to examine how our guilt is being motivated, for what purposes, and to what effects. Any political vocation for a total rejection of guilt or the mechanisms that produce it must be cautious and self-reflexive. Reactive rejections of guilt, debt, or responsibility run the risk of being recuperated by State and capitalist forces. As such, guilt must be understood in the way it connects or attaches individuals to the current arrangements of power in order to reproduce and crystalize those arrangements as a form of domination.

My hope, above all, is that there may be some way to move beyond the subjectivity of bad conscience—that there is some way to create new, non-normative, ungovernable forms of subjectivity that are capable of escaping domination. I am not entirely certain what this would involve. As stated previously, this thesis has been a diagnostic rather than prescriptive project. But insofar as recognizing a problem is the first step towards addressing it, perhaps this thesis can act, in some small way, as a call to address the bad conscience of guilt as a political project.

By way of concluding remarks, I would like to express my gratitude for having been given the opportunity, resources, and time, to work on this project. As Peter Sloterdijk observed on the hundredth anniversary of Nietzsche's death: "Whoever speaks in the conditions permitted—whether from a bourgeois, political, academic, legal, or psychological perspective—will always be in the minus and run around in vain seeking the means by which to pay off and shift overdrawn assertions. Whoever speaks incurs debt; whoever speaks further, discourses in order to pay back" (12). Thank you for the opportunity to perhaps pay something back.

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